

DAN DEACON GEENEUS THE WHIP SPARKS POP LEVI CIRCLESQUARE BUTCH

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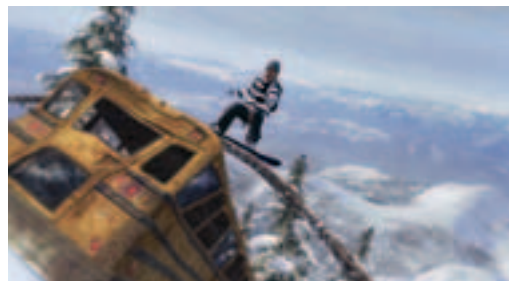




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ED'S RANT: Pop.Life.



PHOTO: MAY TRUONG

Junior Boys ponder the chilly expanse of Lake Ontario.

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ON THE COVER  
Junior Boys, shot in Toronto by May Truong.

FEATURED TYPEFACE  
Designed for XLR8R by Tim Saputo.

For each time that you see the word "pop" appear in this issue of *XLR8R* (save for mentions of Pop Levi's name), know that nearly every instance was preceded by an endless internal debate about the term's shortcomings. It's that musical catch-all that can mean so much, yet so little—no matter how many prefixes are haphazardly slapped onto it. It's true that while we (and everyone else) are probably gonna keep on throwing the word around, "pop" hardly knows the beast that pop itself has become.

So, instead of seeking a new label to toss carelessly into the lexicon, this month we sent our scribes forth to bring back a brand-new understanding of that oft-hyphenated, palindromic rock strand.

As Toronto's Ben Rayner explores in his interviews with Junior Boys, there are myriad popular-music elements in the electro-infused dance pop that Hamilton, Ontario's Jeremy Greenspan and Berlin, Germany's Matt Didemus make across time zones, but their music has as much to do with smooth-rock odes to Southern Cal and the percussive force of Toto's Jeff Porcaro as it does '50s experimental film-editing techniques.

Baltimore contributor Michael Byrne returned with yet another take on pop music after talking with Wham City art-collective founding member Dan Deacon, whose larger-than-life pop show is all about the *populus*. Deacon's playful, thriftstore-instrument-driven noise jams are one thing, but the thriftstore-dressed throngs that help transform his gigs into visceral, hyper-colored experiences of high-art absurdity are entirely another.

To further investigate, we had neo-

glam-dance figurehead Pop Levi chat with the singer of one of L.A.'s weirdest pop bands of all time, Sparks' Russell Mael. Levi uncovered not only where Sparks' brand of bizarre theatrical rock comes from, but also where it's likely to go after 20-odd albums and nearly four decades—to the big screen, if Sparks have it their way.

Elsewhere, *The Whip* gives us a tour through some of the pop-centric details of their fair town of Manchester, and we also get the goods on what makes goth-pop Berliner Circlesquare tick in *Factozoid!*

You'll also find scattered throughout this issue an abundance of mixtapes—our tribute to a seemingly hip-again relic from one of pop's finest eras: the years 1980-1989. Feel free to make your own dubs from the tracklists provided, check out our mixtape podcasts, and don't forget to enter our contest on page 10 to win super-exclusive handcrafted Maxell mixes from Junior Boys and Dan Deacon.

It was a joy to assemble this mixtape pop spectacular, but it wasn't all cheery. Near the end of our deadline, we were struck with the news that Charlie Cooper, one half of Telefon Tel Aviv, had passed away just days after we spoke to his partner Joshua Eustis about what made their newest album the analog-synth gem that it is. Suffice it to say that in our world, Telefon Tel Aviv has topped many a heartfelt mixtape, and Cooper leaves a never-ending legacy with all the music that his band has graced us with over the years. So with two cassette decks set on "play-record" and "pause," we thank him and say our sincerest good-byes.

—Ken Taylor, Editor



## CONTRIBUTORS



### May Truong

Toronto-based photographer May Truong was born on a sinking ship in the middle of the South China Sea. She was almost thrown overboard, but was saved by her father—a kung-fu fighter turned ballroom dancer. May's past is epic. It is most likely due to this past that she has acquired such a quirky way of seeing the world around her. In past issues of *XLR8R*, May shot Crystal Castles, Mu, Bonjay, and Bogdan Racynzski. She photographed Junior Boys in Toronto for this issue.

maytruong.com



### Tom Winchester

Tom Winchester is a New York City-based photographer who is currently working on an MFA in Art Criticism and Writing at the School of Visual Art. His work has appeared in *Nylon*, *Self-Titled*, and *Workingclassmag.com*. As well as photographing this issue's style shoot, he shot issue 124's Grey Gardens fashion spread.

thomasjameswinchester.com



### Ben Rayner

Ben Rayner has been a music critic and pop-culture columnist for the *Toronto Star* since 1998. A regular contributor to publications as diverse as *Gasoline* and *Fashion* magazine, he is obsessed with Joy Division, Martin Amis, and *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, and dreams of leaving the city for a walled compound somewhere near the Arctic Circle the moment he can devise a way to make a living from his passions in the middle of nowhere. Provided, of course, he's still privy to the odd techno party. He wrote about Junior Boys for this issue.



### Josh Sisk

Photographer Josh Sisk's work, which primarily covers local and national music scenes, has been featured in a variety of publications across the country and around the world. In addition to snapping Bob Mould for *XLR8R* issue #117, Josh has also shot for *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*. His favorite subjects are his adopted hometown of Baltimore's wide variety of talented artists and musicians. He photographed Dan Deacon in B-more for this issue.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: Domestic: \$20 (one year, 10 issues) and \$40 (two years, 20 issues); Canada: \$40 (one year) and \$80 (two year); all other international: \$50 (one year) and \$100 (two years). Subscribe by credit card online or send payment to *XLR8R* Subscriptions, 3180 18th St. #303, San Francisco, CA 94110. Payment made out to "XLR8R Magazine." US funds only. International orders must be paid by credit card or international money order. Questions? Email [service@xlr8r.com](mailto:service@xlr8r.com) or subscribe online at [XLR8R.com](http://XLR8R.com).

CIRCULATION: Newsstand distribution through Curtis Circulation. For direct retail sales, contact Jennifer Marston at 415.861.7583 x226 or [jennifer.marston@xlr8r.com](mailto:jennifer.marston@xlr8r.com).

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BIG THANKS TO: Judy Miller at Motormouth, Leila Hebden, Kris Gillespie at Domino, Joe Colly, Piper Nightingale at Irregular Choice, Sameena Ahmad at Built By Wendy, Sara Lahaie at Dr. Marten's, Judi Rosen, Schmoove, Michael Cohn at Mishka, Jill Bradshaw at IHeart, Brooke Auston at 55DSL, Mario Karches at Rebels Booking, Nicole at D.A.P., Amy Levy, Andrew Chen at 3sixteen, Freddie Rojas, Liz Baca, Gamall Awad at Backspin, and Brian Foote at Kranky.

CORRECTION: In issue #124, we inadvertently failed to credit Terence Teh as the writer of that month's Vis-Ed story on Karborn.



*XLR8R* is printed on 100% recycled fiber EcoMatte Plus and Reincarnation Matte papers, which are manufactured with electricity offset renewable energy certificates.

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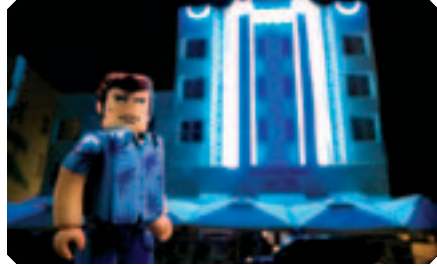
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## XLR8R TV



### LET'S GET VISUAL: GOING BI-COASTAL WITH ARTISTS JK5 AND BRIAN MCCARTY.

To coincide with our special *Vis-Ed* issue of *XLR8R*, we took the TV crew out east, where we got inked by Brooklyn illustrator/tattoo artist JK5. Then we shot even further afield to check out video artist and Space 1026 collaborator Andrew Jeffrey Wright in his Philadelphia studio. Not to leave the west coast feeling lonely, we also took our cameras down to L.A. to check in with Vis-Ed artist [Brian McCarty](#), whose macro toy photography has been commissioned by everyone from Sympathy for the Record Industry to Rockstar Games. Check back later in the month, too, for a profile on the Dirtybird himself, house-music prankster Claude VonStroke.

See all the madness at [XLR8R.com/tv](#), and come back every Tuesday for new episodes, including recent shows with Damien Correll and Lazer Sword.

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Check out music news and features, free MP3 downloads, and reviews updated every day, plus photo blogs, music videos, free PDF versions of *XLR8R*, and a whole lot more at [XLR8R.com](#).

## PODCAST

### DUTCHSTEP KING MARTYN BRINGS THE HEAT.



March's podcast section of *XLR8R.com* is full of musical gems. First up is Dutch dubstep party-starter Martyn, who slays with deep low-end and dubby rhythms. Also bringing the heavy bass is none other than Mario Lopez... Oops, we mean AC Slater, the Bushwick-based bounce-head with a healthy sense of humor and an even healthier crate of killer tunes.

Get your lethal dose of *XLR8R*'s favorite music and sign up for our weekly podcast at [XLR8R.com](#), where we feature exclusive mixes from all across the spectrum.

[XLR8R.COM/PODCAST](#)



### DECEMBER NO. 123

Interview excerpts with Drop the Lime

Lords of Apathy's Six Craziest Political Moments of 2008

Artists' Bests and Worst of 2008

*XLR8R TV* episodes with Carl Craig, Bradford Cox, and Buraka Som Sistema

Shoegaze greatness: Asobi Seksu interviews Neil Halstead, and an exclusive podcast from Damon Way

Audio from Hot Chip's In the Studio interview

[XLR8R.COM/123EXTRAS](#)



### LOOK FOR THE XLR8R.COM EXTRAS ICON

This issue is filled with online extras, including extended interviews, photo outtakes, audio clips, and videos. See them at [XLR8R.COM/125EXTRAS](#)



### JANUARY/FEBRUARY NO. 124

Pics and video from Red Bull Music Academy Barcelona

Interview excerpts with Zomby

MP3 downloads from Luomo, Mr. Oizo, and Lazer Sword

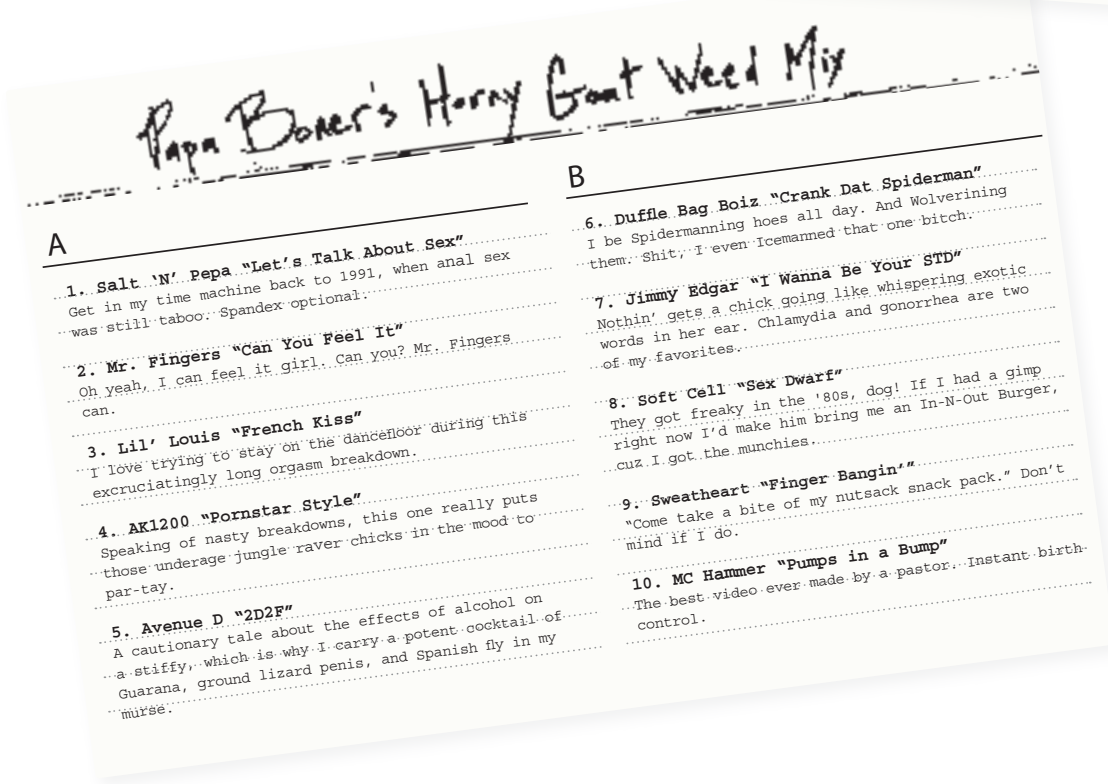
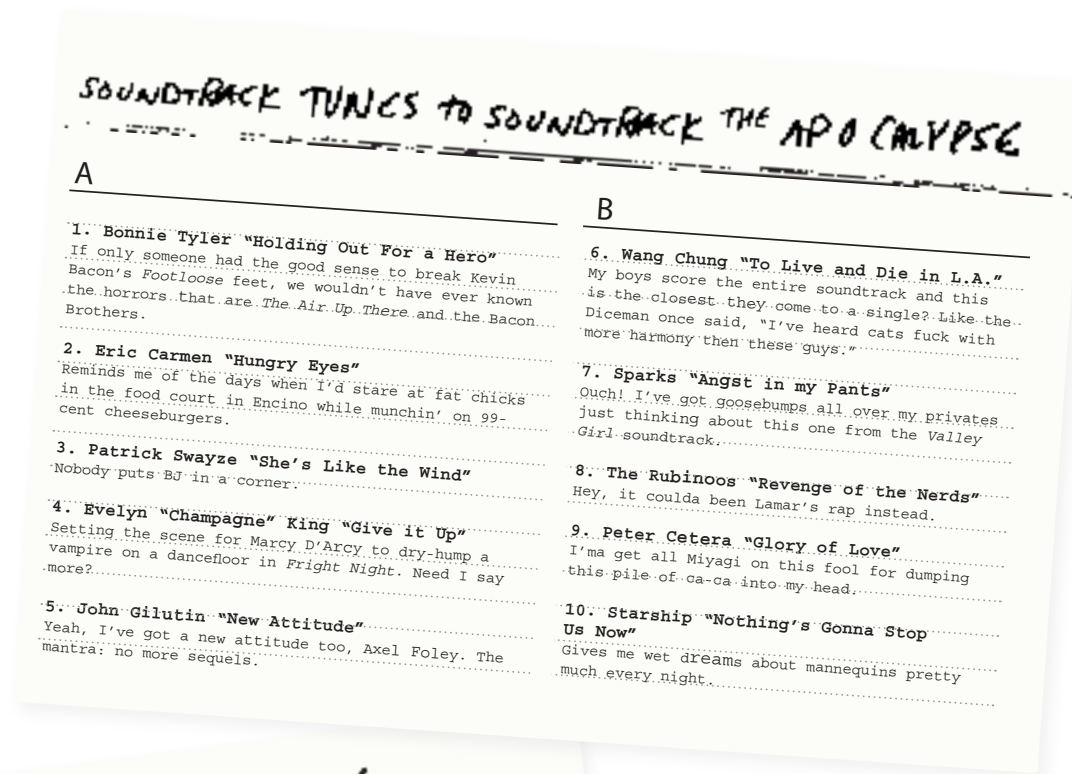
*XLR8R TV* episode with The Glitch Mob

[XLR8R.COM/124EXTRAS](#)

## BJ "Bitter" Bastard's

# Lost Mixtapes

Just like you and me, Bitter Bastard's got a shoebox full of old White Snake and Megadeth cassettes kicking around a dusty drawer in the basement. But underneath those memories of headbanging days past, we found a treasure trove of sentimentality in the form of mixtapes to a long-gone sweetheart. Here's just a couple gems we picked out.



## XLR8R's "Mixtape Madness" Contest

Win homemade mixtapes from Dan Deacon and Junior Boys, plus *XLR8R*'s favorite new tunes.

While CD-R swapping and file sharing amongst friends has pushed the magnetic tape world into a recession for the better part of the 21st century, cassette culture never really disappeared. The art of decking out an awesome mixtape for that special someone, complete with the cute and fuzzy animal doodles on the cover, is a pastime dating back to the dawn of portable tape decks, and still manages to thrive below the radar. Luckily for us, Dan Deacon and our pals in Junior Boys still partake in mixtape debauchery, and as part of this

month's contest, one lucky grand prize winner will snag a one-off, super-exclusive mixtape dubbed and designed by each party. On top of that, we will also be giving away CD copies of Junior Boys' *Beyond Dull Care* (Domino), Dan Deacon's *Bromst* (Carpark), and Fever Ray's *Fever Ray* (Mute) to the winner and three runners-up.

To win, submit a 10-song tracklist for your most awesome mixtape ever, and give us with a one-liner about why you picked each track. (See page 56 for an example.)

One grand prize winner will receive: Two exclusive mixtapes, each recorded and hand-drawn by Dan Deacon and Junior Boys, and a copy of *Beyond Dull Care*, *Bromst*, and *Fever Ray* on CD.

Three runners-up will receive: A copy of *Beyond Dull Care*, *Bromst*, and *Fever Ray* on CD.

Entries will be accepted via standard mail and email, and must be received by March 31, 2009. Send your entry to: *XLR8R*'s Mixtape Madness Contest, 3180 18th St. #303, San Francisco, CA 94110 or email [contest@xlr8r.com](#) with "XLR8R's Mixtape Madness Contest" in the subject line.

[carparkrecords.com](#), [dominorecordsco.com](#), [mute.com](#)





# Butch

Forget the tough nickname. Tech-house's new smooth dude keeps it simple and sassy.

Tech-house producer Butch is into simple pleasures: *South Park*, nice cars, eating sweets, and taking a good shit before a gig. "It's horrible to DJ with a full stomach," the producer, born Bülent Gürler, offers via email from a hotel somewhere in the heart of Deutschland. It might be Essen, Bingen, Bochum, or Lindau—a look at his DJ diary reveals plenty of stops in the German-speaking world and no sleep until late July at least.

Butch's music has caught on like wildfire in the last two years, with a slew of 12-inches on Craft Music, Kontor, and Trapez painting him as one of the most playful names in techno. While minimal continues its slow descent into the K-hole of clicks 'n' cuts and trad house strokes its own idiom, Gürler rides a nice, smooth tech-house wave that's neither predictable nor overly thought-out. "I'm open-minded in every musical direction," says Gürler, who is of Turkish descent but was born and raised in Mainz, Germany. "I even used a classical German carnival sample in one of my tracks."

His recent album for Great Stuff, *Papillon*, further reveals Gürler's ear for melodic synths and ebbing grooves designed to slowly drive dancefloors to climax. Don't be fooled by his overly masculine alias—Butch tracks like "Amelie" and "Jazzy Belle" have a flirtatious quality that most overly macho machine techno does not. Meanwhile, numbers like "Bad Weed," "Ein-E," and his popular "Mushroom Man" (the AFU single that samples *Super Mario*) hint at the narcotic culture that fuels all these late nights. Although Gürler claims to identify with Spanky Ham, the loud and obnoxious party pig from Comedy Central series *Drawn Together*, he ultimately appears to prefer studio time to drug-fueled antics.

Though Gürler's popularity is relatively recent, he's been dabbling in music for the last 15 years. "In the early '90s it was hip-hop that started me off," explains this child of the '80s, who also used to be involved in BMX bikes and graffiti. "As you grow older, your horizon broadens a little, and other music also started to interest me. The first electronic music record I ever bought was [Armand Van Helden's] 'Funk Phenomenon' in the '90s. Back then, I also often went to a club named Prodo-X where many trance greats played, and producers like Kai Tracid and Silent Breed (a.k.a. Thomas P. Heckmann) really fascinated me."

Eventually, he decided to channel all his energies into tech-house, and adopted an alias that was easier to pronounce than his real name. "I remembered a scene from *Pulp Fiction* where Butch (Bruce Willis) was asked by a taxi driver (with the last name Villalobos, by the way) what the meaning of his name was," recalls Gürler. "He answered, 'Names don't mean shit.' That's basically what was on my mind. I just wanted to let the music speak for itself."

• Butch has new releases out now on Area Remote, 8bit, and Trapez. [cometobutch.com](http://cometobutch.com)

FACTOZOID!!

# Circlesquare!

...all the weird facts you never knew you wanted to know about Circlesquare's Jeremy Shaw.

## CIRCLESQUARE IS A BRAINIAC!

"My main obsession right now is MRI and CT brain-imaging scans of people under the influence of mind-altering drugs, or representations of the effects of cumulative use. I'm working on a bunch of visual art that uses them as source material so I have been going great lengths to find them, which is quite difficult if you aren't a neuroscientist or neuroscience student."

## CIRCLESQUARE HATES THE PRIME MINISTER!

"Unfortunately, after the U.S. finally stands up and votes a forward-thinking president into office, Canada is actually under the most right-wing government in memory, compete with massive cuts to arts and culture funding and statements [from Prime Minister Stephen Harper] like, 'The average Canadian doesn't care about art.'"

## CIRCLESQUARE LOVES DAVID LYNCH AND HAROLD AND MAUDE!

"Lynch always creates an underlying tension. It could be through sound design or unnerving images that are never really referred to or resolved, but there is always a bit of unease with everything he does. The ability to create a tension that might not ever climax is a really amazing thing. *Harold and Maude* includes nearly everything that I value in life and art: it's dark without being sinister, sly and funny without being smarmy or negative, incredibly stylish and it's a reminder to remember what it is to be full of wonder. It has very bleak moments and a somewhat bizarre, morose tone at times, yet at the end of it all, it's bittersweet and optimistic. Plus it has an all-Cat Stevens soundtrack, which is incredible."

## CIRCLESQUARE MOVED TO BERLIN BUT STILL LOVES VANCOUVER!

"Vancouver pros: sushi and coffee. Cons: rain and no nightlife. Berlin pros: nightlife and techno. Cons: never-ending nightlife and the single-bar-looping deep-house revival.... I'm doing a project about the 1986 Vancouver Expo, so that's become an imposed obsession of sorts. I scour eBay daily, looking for random ephemera from it and have had days digging through the Vancouver archives."

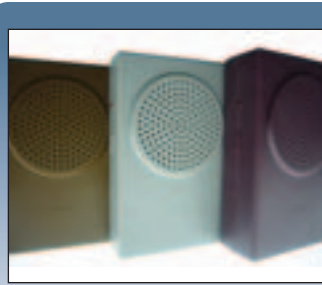
## CIRCLESQUARE IS NAMED AFTER A CHRISTIAN KIDS' SHOW FROM THE '70S!

"I barely remember the show [*Circle Square*] but for the theme song, and the way they'd sing their address for people wanting to send letters. It was on on Sunday mornings when there was nothing else on TV. It had these puppets mixed with real kid actors. I didn't really realize that it was Christian at the time, even though I was going to church in those days. I have no idea why I missed this point. I definitely found it somewhat creepy, yet continued to watch. It was like a Sunday school show for kids who didn't go to Sunday school, but [set] on a ranch... with puppets."

Circlesquare's *Songs About Dancing and Drugs* is out now on !K7. [circlesquare.ca](http://circlesquare.ca), [songsaboutdancinganddrugs.com](http://songsaboutdancinganddrugs.com)



Listen to Circlesquare's exclusive XLR8R podcast at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).



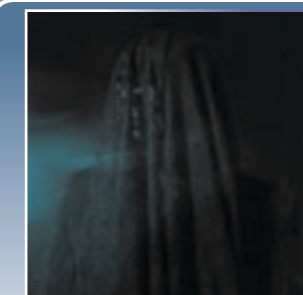
**FM3**  
*Buddha Machine II Soundbox*

FM3 is back with an all-new version of the extraordinary soundbox praised by artists as diverse as Brian Eno, Monolake and Daft Punk. An interactive album with 9 new loops, 3 new colors and a new pitch bend feature, the *Buddha Machine 2.0* lets users customize the listening experience. "An extraordinary piece of sound art." —The Wire



**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Round Black Ghosts 2 CD*

~scape's highly-acclaimed compilation series is the point of reference for dubstep that skirts the boundaries of techno and other flavors of electronic music. Vital tracks by figureheads like Pevelerist & Appleblim, Flying Lotus, Pole, Martyn, Kode9, Scuba, and more.



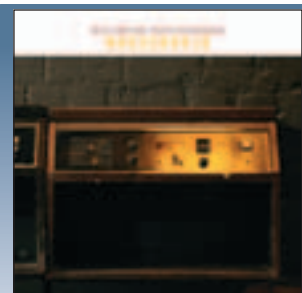
**SVARTE GREINER**  
*Kappe CD/LP*

The highly-anticipated sophomore album on Type from Norway's genre-busting dark ambient project Svarte Greiner is another milestone in doom music. Featuring a guest appearance by Kjetil Møster (Ultrasj), Kappe is a horrifying, blackened underworld cruise bringing to mind Skullflower or a slow-motion Sonic Youth.



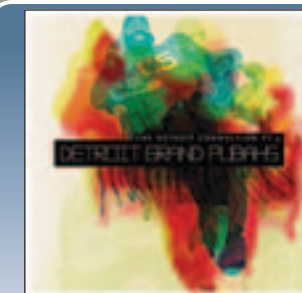
**CLARO INTELECTO**  
*Warehouse Sessions CD*

Mark Stewart presents all five releases from his highly-lauded *Warehouse Sessions 12"* series, remastered and with an exclusive bonus track. Positively sleazy post-industrial attacks, contaminated techno and shocking Maurizio-style dub workouts will leave you devastated.



**ALEC EMPIRE** *Rauschgold: Alec Empire Plays Staubgold CD*

The driving force behind Digital Hardcore puts his hands on the Staubgold back-catalog, producing 70 minutes of droning Krautrock madness that is guaranteed to make you dance. Artists include Faust, Mapstation, Autistic Daughters, Organ Eye, Klangwart, and many more.



**DETROIT GRAND PUBAHS**  
*The Detroit Connection Pt. 4 CD*

By no means just another mix CD, this enhanced DJ set from the world's best, funkier and weirdest techno duo adds live music made on the fly on top of classic tracks from Benga, Laurent Garnier, Radio Slave, Mark Broom, and so many more.



**ATOM™**  
*Liedgut CD*

Uwe Schmidt (Señor Coconut, Atom Heart) makes his debut for the Raster-Noton label, exploring Austro-German time and space with an album of digital waltzes, romantic lyrics and scientific exercises on Schubert chord progressions. Kraftwerk's Florian Schneider contributes on vocals.



**ALVA NOTO**  
*Xerrox Vol. 2 CD*

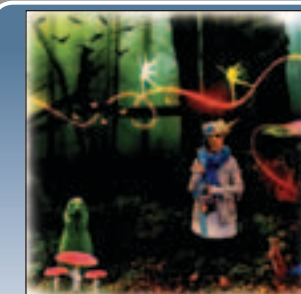
Carsten Nicolai's dynamic *Xerrox* series continues with tracks composed from condensed samples of artists Michael Nyman, Stephen O'Malley and Ryuichi Sakamoto. "...one of the most important figures in modern electronic music."

—Boomkat



**FAUST** *C'est Com... Com... Complique CD/LP*

Almost 40 years since they began, the brand new studio album from Krautrock legends Faust sounds as fantastic and as relevant as ever. The timeless collage of Dadaism, free improvisation and overflowing repetition from these monoliths of avant-garde rock is phenomenal.



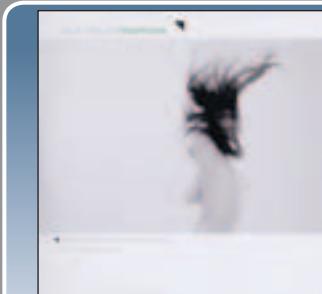
**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Strike 100 2CD/3LP*

Shitkatapult celebrates their 100<sup>th</sup> release with an adrenaline-soaked collection, available as a double CD or triple vinyl. 25 electronic tracks from an all-star roster including T.Raumschimere, Apparat, The Orb, Jan Jelinek, Warren Suicide, Peter Dinklage, and more.



**TELEFON TEL AVIV**  
*Immolate Yourself CD*

Having remixed artists like Apparat and Barbara Morgenstern, Telefon Tel Aviv combines popular dance music with their own darker approach to synth-pop. Their third album unites ten tracks full of saturated vintage synths and '80s aesthetics that will give the term "electro-pop" a new definition.



**AGF/DELAY**  
*Symptoms CD*

The latest from electronic/avant-hop duo Antye Greie (AGF) and Sasu Ripatti (Luomo) is both catchy and challenging, woven from full beats, dubby textures and tiny digital sound gimmickry. This is pop music for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will leave an indelible imprint on electronic music.



These titles available at fine independent record stores or online at [www.forcedexposure.com](http://www.forcedexposure.com)

Retailers: request wholesale information from [fe@forcedexposure.com](mailto:fe@forcedexposure.com)

CLOTHES CAPTIONED

# 3sixteen

Look sharp with this Lower East Side line's tech fabrics and special touches.

Andrew Chen and Johan Lam have based their six-year-old clothing brand 3sixteen in the heart of the Lower East Side, which means mice under the floorboards, hipsters on the streets, and plenty of rowdy meals at Congee Village, the Chinese porridge spot where they like to toast out-of-towners. An LES headquarters also means a live feed to the pulse of NYC streetwear. It's a pulse they've read well but refuse to fall victim to, gracefully segueing in the past two years from a graphic tee-dominated line into a go-to for well-made men's outerwear. "Our focus is on wearable garments that will stand the test of time," says Chen. "We're getting older and have found that we look for versatile clothing that can be dressed up or dressed down easily."

While the spring '09 line definitely gets its grown man on—check the seersucker and herringbone patterns, USA-made selvedge denim, and "technical" fabrics—3sixteen isn't always so staid, as collaborations with sunglass-makers Sabrevision, barbers Dickson Hairshop, and Philly punk band The Deathset attest. But Chen and Lam say they can't stay away from the classics: Sonny Rollins and Coltrane on the stereo, Clarks Desert Boots on the feet, and a New York state of mind. *Tyra Bangs*  
3sixteen.com



**Canvas Peacoat (\$240)**  
To me, this lightweight spring peacoat is a wardrobe staple. Dress it up or throw it on with a pair of jeans... It will be in rotation for many years to come.



**Hooded Henley (\$165)**  
This Henley features a unique dual-layer jersey material that wicks away moisture better than a standard cotton material. We employ military-styled snap closures throughout the line so we incorporated them into this piece.

**Sunday sunglasses (\$110)**  
We worked with California-based sunglass manufacturer Sabrevision to design these marbled acetate frames. They are great people and we're looking forward to more projects together.



**Monsoon Jacket (\$220)**  
The monsoon jacket was our fastest selling outerwear piece. We refined the fit, added lots of details, and gave it a breathable mesh lining for spring.



**Utility Shirt (\$130)**  
We combined traditional workwear and military design elements with a traditional summer fabric (seersucker) to create this button-down. I especially like the twill herringbone sleeve straps that hold your cuffs up when they're rolled.

## WINTER GLOVES

about a girl

Available March 24, 2009  
CD/LP/Digital

## JOSH REICHMANN/ORACLE BAND

CRAZY POWER

Available March 10, 2009  
CD/LP/Digital

PAPER BAG DIGITAL

CFCF • Panesian Nights	montag • hibernation
the acorn • heron act	you say party! we say die! • remik's cube

PAPER BAG RECORDS

two fingers • s/t	woodhands • heart attack
slim twig • vernacular violence	laura barrett • victory garden

Words Rob Geary  
Photo Alex Solmsen

The sexy, silly, and just plain strange lives of techno producer Sheldon Thompson.

# Pan / Tone

Sheldon "Pan/Tone" Thompson is a man on the run. In the past five years, he's moved from Toronto to Cologne to Berlin with numerous waypoints in between; he's fresh off a season of festivals and an Amsterdam holiday, and there's a criminal on the loose with a grip of his gear. Yet it's all much less sinister than it sounds, explains the creator of the thick, bouncy dark techno/house hybrid album *Skip the Foreplay*. "When I moved from Cologne, the final week, my studio got broken into," explains Thompson, who now calls Berlin his home base. "More than 60% of it got destroyed or stolen. That was my 'Goodbye Cologne' party!"

Not that it was a bad run for Thompson. Lured away from Torontonian punk and hip-hop bands by a well-established techno community centered around the Kompakt label (and, of course, a girl), Thompson expanded upon the rock-infused electro

of his Sid Le Rock alias, the dubby, bedroom-eyed tech-house of his work as Gringo Grinder, and the globalized techno of Pan/Tone, which touches on early Detroit, the arpeggiated synths of '90s Europe (Orbital's footprints are all over "Falcon & the Snowman"), and the distorted rock aesthetic of Justice.

The call of Berlin proved strong, not in the least because fellow Canadian cronies Jake Fairley and The Mole (a.k.a. Colin de la Plante) had already made the jump. "For the five years that I've been living in Germany I was dead-set against moving to Berlin even though so many of my friends were living here," says Thompson. "I'm glad I did it finally. Everyone's gravitating towards here so it's bound to happen. As I was moving here it was springtime, so the tulips were rising from the ground and everyone was in a great mood;

everyone's out of hibernation mode. With that comes a lot of parties and it kind of rattled my brain but now I see that everyone does eventually rest... So time to record!"

If you're getting the idea that Thompson likes to upset straight-laced genre tags, you'd be right—and don't expect any less from his chaotic, high-energy live sets, which tend to cycle through his aliases depending on the gig or festival. "It gets a bit confusing," he informs. "When I get booked to play somewhere, I always have to come with three different live sets and then ask the promoter, 'Who am I tonight?' Split identities work against me!" And despite his name, the one identity Pan/Tone doesn't assume is that of graphic designer. "I like color but I'm not actually a designer," he avers. "After a while it's kind of a stupid nickname but you just go with it anyway."

• Pan/Tone's *Skip the Foreplay* is out now on Onitor. [pantone-music.de](http://pantone-music.de)

OMG!

OMG!

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is runnin' tings.

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Up-to-the-Minute  
Music Reviews

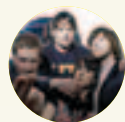
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CLASSIC!

CITY GUIDE

# The Whip's Manchester



A musical trip through Manchester isn't all just Smiths and Stone Roses nostalgia, Nathan, Danny, and Bruce of electro-rock outfit **The Whip** turn us onto some of the lesser-known gems of life in this northern town.



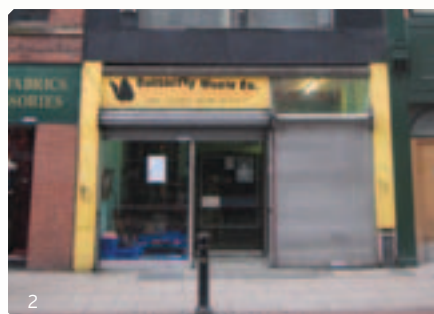
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**1. OLDHAM STREET, NORTHERN QUARTER**  
This is where the whole "northern quarter" thing started, and is an important place for us. Loads of bars like Matt & Phred's, the old Planet K (which is where Nathan first met Danny 11 years ago), and Night & Day Café. Lots of record shops and lots of fond memories for everyone in the band!

**2. BUTTERFLY MUSIC**  
Originally a record shop, Butterfly is where we all used to rehearse (on the top floor), although in different bands at different times. It doesn't sell records anymore but still lives on as a proper rehearsal space, which is a shame because we used to pick up some secondhand classics downstairs during breaks from rehearsing.

**3. KINGFISHER FISH & CHIPS**  
Ahhhhh, the Tib Street chippy, just around the corner from Butterfly Music. It's where many a hungry band member found themselves before, during, or after a rehearsal. It's the best chippy in the northern quarter—FACT! My favorite was a chip balm (sandwich) and a sausage.

**4. HACIENDA APARTMENTS**  
This is all that is left of our most famous musical landmark, the Hacienda Club. It was owned by New Order, and was one of the most important piles of bricks in Manchester. During the day it's a great bar; at night, it's a venue that gives new bands a place to play whilst also hosting full-on touring bands from around the globe. Recently the building was flattened and replaced by over-priced, cheaply made apartments for terrible people who think they live in a piece of history. They just sleep on its grave!

**5. NIGHT & DAY CAFÉ**  
Directly across from Piccadilly Records, the Night & Day is one of the most famous music venues in Manchester. During the day it's a great bar; at night, it's a venue that gives new bands a place to play whilst also hosting full-on touring bands from around the globe.



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**6. WORLD'S FIRST STORED-PROGRAM COMPUTER**  
The world's first stored-program computer was made at the University of Manchester. It ran its first successful program in 1948. This marked the beginning of the computer revolution. You could say that if this baby hadn't been made we wouldn't be making the music we make today!

**7. IRA BOMBING SITE**  
On June 15, 1996, an IRA bomb went off in Manchester causing widespread devastation. The only thing left undamaged was a red postbox, which is still there today. As a consequence, and I suppose in a positive way, Manchester has gone through massive regeneration making the city into what it is today.

**8. GMEX ARENA**  
An old railway station that was used as a venue in the early '90s, the GMEX saw all the Manchester greats. It closed down for a while but is now back up and running. This is one of the places that we would love to play. Another piece of Manchester music history.

**9. THE BLACK LION PUB**  
This is the pub in Salford where Danny and I got the ball rolling with The Whip. We had a studio in the cellar—really dirty and damp, and none of the barmaids would go downstairs, as they thought the place was haunted. It was the perfect sleazy environment. Parts on the album have a faint karaoke crooner's voice—that was from the pub above us.

**10. PICCADILLY RECORDS**  
This is the record shop of choice for The Whip. It has always been a supporter of new music from all genres—a true independent that has survived!

The Whip's *X Marks Destination* is out now on Razor & Tie.  
[myspace.com/thewhipmanchester](http://myspace.com/thewhipmanchester)

# Mi Ami

Getting wet and wild with Touch and Go's latest dance-punk combo.



From left: Damon Palermo, Daniel Martin-McCormick, Jacob Long

It's a Saturday afternoon, and Daniel Martin-McCormick is using breakfast to describe his band, Mi Ami. "I love when you go out to breakfast and get eggs, toast, hashbrowns, and coffee. All those things fit together nicely on a plate," he explains. "If you think about the way you would construct a song, bass, drums, and guitar are archetypes of frequency ranges and the way that sounds are made. The drums propel it, the bass holds down the low-end and locks in with the drums, and the guitar sits on top."

As simple as that sounds, Mi Ami is actually very complex. Comprised of Martin-McCormick on vocals and guitar, bassist Jacob Long, and drummer Damon Palermo, the band builds post-disco jams that constantly shift, transforming into noise freak-outs and layered dub grooves. On their debut full-length, *Watersports*, the band drops hints of surprising influences like Arthur Russell, Ricardo Villalobos, and Manuel Göttsching, but also nods to African guitar music, post-punk, and free jazz. "It's not that we're beyond influence, because that's a

fucking preposterous and super-pompous thing to say," Martin-McCormick admits. "It's more about cultivating this conversation we're having with each other than looking back at our old records."

Martin-McCormick met Palermo when he was studying classical guitar at San Francisco State University. Both connected over a desire to bridge their loves of noise, disco, and punk. "I had this really good feeling [about meeting Palermo], kind of like when you first meet a girl and you're like, 'Oh, shit,'" Martin-McCormick recalls. "I didn't want to come on too strong but I was pretty sure that it was going to be something awesome."

They recruited bassist Jacob Long a year later. Martin-McCormick had previously played with Long in the proto dance-punk band Black Eyes, but felt limited by their compromised dynamic. "It was not a band that I feel like had a unified vision," he says. "It didn't have a strong clarity of purpose so much as a lot of energy coming from each member that wound up in the shape of songs."

As a trio, however, Mi Ami has struck the perfect balance between collaboration and individual vision. That democratic ethos certainly pays off on *Watersports*. From the opening dub sound of "Echononecho," through the messy-but-jovial guitars on tracks like "New Guitar," the album showcases some familiar rock moves (the quiet/loud dynamic, pulsating dance moments, thrash excursions) as interpreted through the diverse perspectives of three very obsessive music fans.

Going to music school and studying heady, high-art compositions, Martin-McCormick felt the pressure to achieve. "I got really stressed out for a while because I thought I needed to be making masterpieces or making music that somehow represented the grand mystery of the cosmos," he says. Rather than give up, he realized that he could pair his lofty ambitions with the immediacy and urgency of punk rock. "I think art is where you should have a bold, flawed, personal vision. The world doesn't need any well-oiled art machines. We don't need perfection. We need humanity and flaws."



Check out Mi Ami on XLR8R TV at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).

*Watersports* is out now on Touch and Go. [myspace.com/miamiamiami](http://myspace.com/miamiamiami)

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ELEMENTS

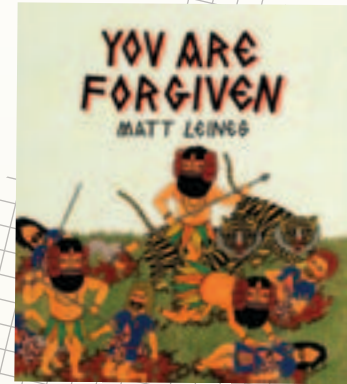
# In Living Color

Compiled by Vivian Host

From mystical to practical, a selection of wild things for spring.



1. Suck UK Villain chair (€4500) suck.uk.com



2. Matt Leines You Are Forgiven monograph (\$45) artbook.com



5. James Jarvis Bird God figure (£31.95) amostoys.com



3. Freestyle Shark Classic Mid watch (\$55) freestyleusa.com

6. Steven Harrington x Incase 15" laptop sleeve (\$59.95) goincase.com

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7. Adidas Originals Honey Mid Grun shoe (\$75) adidasoriginals.com

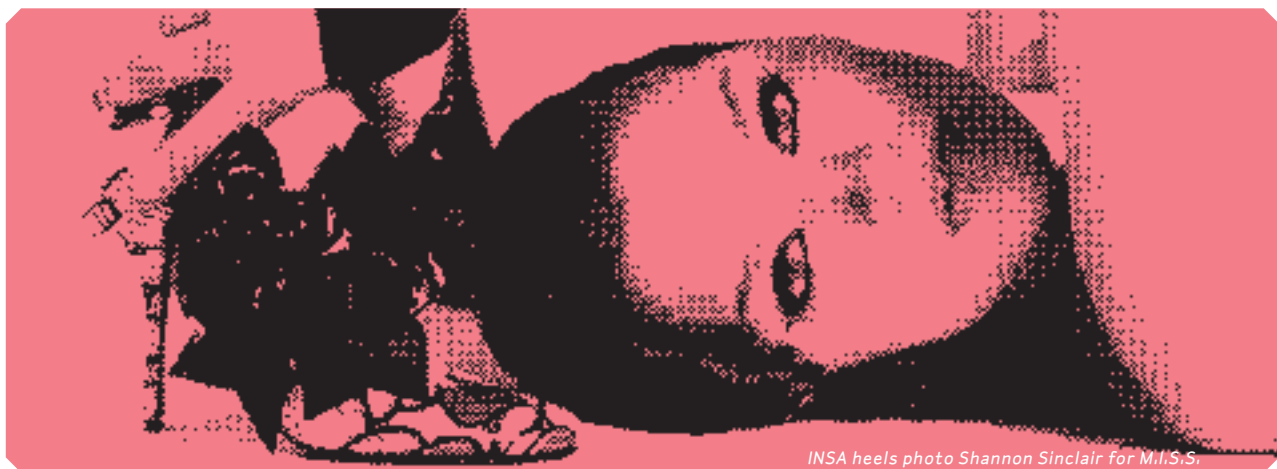
8. Andy Smith x 2K t-shirt (\$35) 2ktshirts.com

9. Keep Batwing hoodie (\$94.50) keepcompany.com

10. Dr. Martens Pascal boot (\$110) drmartens.com

11. '80s Cube clock (\$22) fredflare.com

# Spin Cycle



INSA heels photo Shannon Sinclair for M.I.S.S.

British graf artist and fetish enthusiast **INSA** recently unleashed the latest batch of his hand-painted high heels for the fly girls of the world. Named after different London boroughs, these dainty steps ain't cheap, but £200 will buy you one-of-a-kind street feet. Visit [insa-heels.com](http://insa-heels.com) for more.

Instrumental hip-hop auteur **Odd Nosdam** has created the soundtrack for Element Skateboards' newest film, *This is My Element*. The *T.I.M.E.* Soundtrack will also be released via Anticon on March 10. For all your old-school U.K. hardcore and breakbeat needs, visit Boston-based **DevNull's** online MP3 flashback, [blogtotheoldskool.com](http://blogtotheoldskool.com).

All skate! In January, experimental electronic artist **Ethan Rose** played live at Portland's Oaks Park Roller Rink while fans skated round and round.

**Smiths'** bass player **Andy Rourke** has signed on as Director of A&R for NYC-and-Toronto-based music-marketing company The MuseBox.

U.K. MC **Sway**, dancehall queen **Ce'cile**, and rapper **Ms. Jade** appear on the eponymous debut from **Two Fingers**, a new project from **Amon Tobin** and **Joe Chapman**.

House label **2020Vision** has teamed up with clothing label **Electronic Poet** to have 2020 artists design limited-edition t-shirts. The label has also launched two new podcasts; check [2020recordings.com](http://2020recordings.com) for more.

**Ableton** and **Cycling '74** have teamed to release **Max for Live**, which allows you to use Max/MSP's innovative algorithmic instruments and effects inside the Live template.

Tastemaking British indie **Moshi Moshi**, **Steve Bug's** minimal house outpost **Poker Flat**, and artist-driven streetwear label Upper Playground all turn 10 in 2009.

**Airwalk** recently released an update of their 1980s desert boot.

**Danger Mouse** co-produced the April debut of disorienting computer folk from **Joker's Daughter**, the alias of U.K. singer-songwriter **Helena Costas**.

On the heels of **Clogs** and **Bell Orchestre** performing with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, **M83** will play with the L.A. Philharmonic this month. More at [laphil.org](http://laphil.org).

## Ten Spot(s)

Journeys in sound and subculture via the **Easy10** film series.

Last year, Scion gave 10 publications—including *Wax Poetics*, *Giant Robot*, and yours truly—three months each to create a short film. The resulting work was compiled into a film series, *Easy 10*, that debuted in February in New York and L.A. For *XLR8R's* entry, *The Bus*, filmmaker Ryan Junell joined a DIY community touring the East Coast in a reclaimed, veggie-oil-powered city bus that's been turned into a venue for mind-melting punk and metal shows. Other films in the series tackle such topics as searching for NYC surf, unearthing a U.S. Army funk band from the Vietnam era, and the life and times of Big Daddy Kane.

[SCION.COM/EASY10](http://scion.com/easy10)



A still from The Bus



## ;D Phone Pix! From Max Tundra

This is a shop window display in Łódź, Poland with women's heels and some other strange stuff, including a net curtain. I turned the phone picture upside down, added some blue from a bowling alley in Japan, and it became the album cover for *Parallax Error Beheads You*.

MAX TUNDRA'S PARALLAX ERROR BEHEADS YOU (DOMINO) IS OUT NOW. [MAXTUNDRA.COM](http://MAXTUNDRA.COM)

## ROLL OUT

Dice Club opens in Berlin.



On Valentine's Day, a new love letter to German clubland was unveiled. Dice Club is a "post-industrial" (duh) space in a reclaimed electricity station on Voltairstrasse in the trendy Mitte district; its chief claims to fame are an expansive rooftop terrace (for those E'd up Sunday sunrises!) and the "most expensive PA" that Funktion One has ever installed in a club. The opening weeks featured sets from some surprising names, including Lawrence, Fabrice Lig, Agaric, and Barbara Presinger, and DJs from Minus and Get Physical promise to up the ante in the months ahead. [DICE-CLUB.DE](http://DICE-CLUB.DE)



### WHAT'S GOOD...

Expect new records in the coming months from Spank Rock (Downtown), Cryptacize (Asthmatic Kitty), Bat for Lashes (Astralwerks), DJ T. (Get Physical), Andreas Tillander as Mokira (Type), and Depeche Mode, who issue their 12th studio album, *Sounds of the Universe* (Mute/Capitol), on April 21.



## Analog Killers

### Mixtape by Black Strobe vocalist Arnaud Rebotini

1. DBX "LIVE WIRE"  
One beat-box (probably a DMX), one synth (probably a Roland SH101), and that's it... That's techno. That's minimal.
2. NITZER EBB "CAPTIVATE"  
The funkier EBM band ever, and this song is one of their grooviest. Funk isn't always found where you think.
3. UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE "JUPITER JAZZ"  
The techno lords from Detroit—a classic track... A 909, a TB-303, and a Juno 2 sound great here.
4. ARMANDO "151"  
Timeless. Produced in 1988 and it still sounds amazing.
5. LFO "LFO"  
Okay, there's not only analog synths on this one... but it sounds so good.
6. DEPECHE MODE "BEHIND THE WHEEL" (SHEP PETTIBONE REMIX)  
One the best DM songs ever, and the best remix ever made—melancholic and so groovy.
7. ROBERT WYATT "SEA SONG"  
Robert Wyatt is one my main influences, especially the way he plays synth. The track sounds deep and beautifully naive.
8. TONES ON TAIL "LIONS"  
What an amazing song! A mix of '60s psyche pop, dub, and electronics. Probably one of the best pop songs of the '80s.
9. CABARET VOLTAIRE "YASHAR"  
This track is a proper underground hit. I love their raw sound—the correct use of analog synthesizers.
10. CARL CRAIG "MIND OF A MACHINE"  
The most Moroder-influenced track of Carl Craig's catalog is also the opening track of his first album, *Landcruising*.

ARNAUD REBOTINI'S MUSIC COMPONENTS IS OUT NOW ON CITIZEN. [MYSAPCE.COM/ARNAUDREBOTINI](http://MYSAPCE.COM/ARNAUDREBOTINI)

Arnaud Rebotini muses on his mixtape on *XLR8R TV* at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).



# GET OUT OF LINE.



**THE SCION xD**  
**UNITED BY INDIVIDUALITY**

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what moves you

OUT

TO

JEAN

ON THEIR NEW ALBUM, ELECTRO-POP DUO **JUNIOR BOYS** WADE THROUGH AN OCEAN OF SURPRISING INFLUENCES, YACHT ROCK INCLUDED.

WORDS [BEN RAYNER](#) PHOTOS [MAY TRUONG](#)



Six years ago, Hamilton, Ontario's Junior Boys swiftly and wholly unintentionally ascended to near-fame on the back of a couple of singles ("Birthday," "High Come Down") lovingly circulated throughout the web. Back then, there was nary a hint of the influence that '70s crooner Boz Scaggs and government-backed animation would eventually have on the duo's soulful, broken two-step pop stunners.



FROM LEFT: JEREMY GREENSPAN AND MATT DIDEMUS



Riding a wave of popularity right on through 2007's Grammy-nominated Carl Craig remix of "Like a Child," the Boys became even more techno-fabulous when newly married member Matt Didemus relocated to Berlin a year-and-a-half ago. But instead of mining that *au courant* geographic and cultural connection for their new album, *Begone Dull Care*, the pair dug deep, seeking inspiration in a dusty corner of the Canadian National Film Board's vast archives and the work of an unsung soft-rock session drummer.

#### HITTIN' SKINS

"We've always worn on our sleeves what we're interested in and what we're listening to," divulges the duo's Jeremy Greenspan, while working his way through an enormous, overpriced breakfast plate at a *faux*-greasy spoon in downtown Toronto's hip West End (about 40 minutes from his hometown on a good-traffic day). "While we were making this album, I was listening to a lot of '70s MOR [middle-of-the-road soft rock]—Steely Dan, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Carole King—and a lot of that had to do with me getting really into this drummer, Jeff Porcaro.

"I got so into Jeff Porcaro that I was basically saying, 'This is how the entire rhythmic structure of the album should work. It should all be referencing Jeff Porcaro in some way.' I went so far as to buy his instructional drum DVDs. And I'm not a drummer."

For the unschooled, the late Porcaro's enviable resume included stints backing Sonny and Cher, Boz Scaggs, and Steely Dan, along with innumerable for-hire gigs that had him in the studio with everyone from Miles Davis to Madonna to Michael Jackson, for whom he kept the beat on *Thriller*.

Greenspan came to the man via a tune that will be completely alien to anyone who's never endured heavily regulated Canadian radio: an adult-contemporary chestnut by Marc Jordan called "Living in Marina Del Rey," an ode to the SoCal hotspot—"yacht rock" ground zero.

"Listening to it, I was, like, 'Man, this drummer is fucking fantastic. Who was the drummer on this record?'" he enthuses. "On some nerd level, I just had to find out. And this is the genius of Discogs.com: I went on and started looking around at Jeff Porcaro and everything he played on, and it was like, 'This guy is the greatest drummer who ever lived.'"

#### RIPTIDES

Worry not. The Junior Boys haven't gone totally Captain and Tennille on *Begone Dull Care*, their third full-length. But they have clearly learned a thing or two about how to bring a slick, subtle funk backbeat to well-heeled electronic music that is truly adult and contemporary. That rarified, Porcaro-fied style looms large on "Bits and Pieces," for instance, which whips past like a choice piece of late-'70s smooth rock flirting with R&B.

Yet while the tone of the tunes is generally the Boys' mellowest and most mature yet, their electronic roots are never far from the surface. On percolating softies like "The Animator" and "What It's For," you can hear Junior Boys' shared passion for vintage synthesizer music; Greenspan namechecks committed experimentalists Laurie Spiegel and Max Matthews, as well as

"really bizarre, *avant-garde* synth music in the pop realm" (Yellow Magic Orchestra, Chas Jankel, Bill Nelson). Classic Chicago acid house is the backbone for the magnificent mid-tempo club cut "Work."

The result is a warm, breathy, and highly refined electro-pop brew that recognizes and embraces Hall & Oates, Larry Heard, and modular-synth twiddling as products of the same culture, while winkingly acknowledging the fetish for high-end production shared by electronic music and pristine '70s studio fare. *Begone Dull Care* sounds positively sumptuous from the moment the gleaming first notes of "Parallel Lines" waft out of your headphones, yet Greenspan and Didemus left the mixes remarkably uncluttered, resisting their urge to make it "the Steve Vai of production records."

#### A DULL ROAR

The Junior Boys' influences were not strictly musical—a guiding light also came in the form of Canadian National Film Board animator Norman McLaren.

*Begone Dull Care* is named for one of the many visionary films the acclaimed McLaren produced during a long tenure at the NFB that began in the early 1940s (he earned an Oscar in 1952 for the brilliant stop-motion short *Neighbours*). Greenspan concedes a mild obsession with the man's work, and not just because of his visual daring—McLaren also composed his own burbling electronic soundtracks by physically drawing waveforms onto the tape reels that accompanied his films. Later, he would use a complicated system of tones and pitches inscribed onto cards to concoct futuristic, jumbled soundscapes.

As Greenspan cast about for a unifying model around which to structure the new album, he realized he shared an abiding artistic kinship with McLaren.

"All these coordinates of my own interests and my own ideas were converging at Norm McLaren, for some reason. I was listening to all this experimental synthesizer music and McLaren himself was a total innovator, doing this kind of synthesis that no one had ever done before and no one has really done since," he says.

"I wanted to use him as the analogy for everything I wanted to be as an artist, everything I thought was important," he continues. "No one could question how *avant-garde* and advanced his techniques were. They were probably some of the best in the world. But he wasn't elitist. He was a populist. He wanted to make films that any child, any person, could watch and understand and relate to and, for me, that's always been really important—to make electronic music that had the potential to be popular. Sometimes we're not as popular as I might have hoped, but I try to make music that could be on the radio."

#### HIGH COME DOWN

The band, of course, never actively sought out the comfortable level of popularity it now enjoys. While studying comparative literature at Hamilton's McMaster University, Greenspan began making music for kicks with co-founding member Johnny Dark

"I DON'T THINK IT'S ANY LONGER PARTICULARLY 'COOL' TO BE INTO US.

NO ONE HAS TO FIGHT TO BE THE FIRST PERSON TO LIKE THE BAND." -JEREMY GREENSPAN



(who left the band shortly after their first EP, and is now exploring a comparably fey synth-pop vibe with San Serac as Stereo Image).

Almost accidentally, some of the duo's early demos—bracing collisions of high-tech R&B rhythms and wounded sissy-boy vocals—found their way to Britain's KIN Records, a small imprint with Warp connections. The lovely "Birthday," in particular, was rabidly championed by the nascent blog nation, and suddenly the Junior Boys had a deal with Domino Records for their debut album, *Last Exit*, and touring commitments to honor on a couple of continents.

Didemus' departure for Berlin shortly after the release of 2006's *So This Is Goodbye* could have spelled the duo's demise, but in the end, says Greenspan, the only challenge of being an ocean away from his creative partner was "coming up with a methodology" that allowed them to continue writing songs together.

Much "jet-setting" ensued, as both parties strongly believe that their collaborative dynamic demands "two people being in the same place." Between flights, Greenspan did wind up doing some of the work on *Begone Dull Care* by himself, but it doesn't appear to have caused a rift. "Ultimately, I didn't feel as though Matt wasn't there enough not to call it a Junior Boys record," he says.

"The distance thing was little strange at first, but I think we figured it out along the way," says Didemus from Berlin. "It involved several transatlantic flights and lots of waiting for FTP nonsense. But we have studios in both Berlin and

Hamilton, so it's really not that bad. Plus, after enough traveling, a seven-hour flight isn't really a big deal."

That said, the plan for the next album is to do the recording exclusively in Berlin, which raises the spectre of Junior Boys going minimal on us the next time out (remixes by Alex Smoke, Chloe, and Fennesz notwithstanding). Whatever results, Greenspan hopes it will be received with genuine enthusiasm, rather than simple hype.

"The really fun thing about making this record is that we've been able to move beyond buzz," says Greenspan. "When we started off, I was super-glad that people were excited about us—no question. But there was that quality to us when we started that it was kind of a 'buzz' thing. Some people were really into it and then other people would just talk about it.

"Now, the people who like us, like us. Hopefully, more people will hear it and like it. But the people who don't like it maybe won't have to talk about how they don't like it so much. I don't think it's any longer particularly 'cool' to be into us. No one has to fight to be the first person to like the band."

Junior Boys' *Begone Dull Care* is out April 7 on Domino. [myspace.com/juniorboys](http://myspace.com/juniorboys)

## Jeremy Greenspan's Making "Begone Dull Care" Mixtape

### A

#### 1. Theo Parrish "Going Downstairs"

We had this night in London where a whole bunch of people went out to see Theo Parrish, and he dropped this track and everybody just sorta lost it and agreed that this guy was saving dance music.

#### 2. Chaz Jankel "Without You"

I used to always play 3,000,000 synths out when I was DJing, but I became a total believer in Chaz Jankel as a songwriter, and true innovator... Oh, and The Blockheads were pretty much the best rhythm section in music for a decade or so.

#### 3. Kelley Polar "Satellites"

By far, my favorite album of last year. I can't say enough good things about Kelley Polar. I can't wait till he writes a full-on opera and becomes our generation's Stephen Sondheim. Energy!

#### 4. Toto "Georgy Porgy"

As you already know, I became totally obsessed with Jeff Porcaro, who is without question my favorite drummer of all time. He played on everything, and steals the show without trying every single time. I tried to translate his drumming style into the rhythm tracks whenever I could.

#### 5. Yellow Magic Orchestra "Light in Darkness"

Was stuff this weird ever actually popular? I don't know for sure, but I would totally kill to live in a universe where it was.

### B

#### 6. Bill Nelson "Flaming Desire"

See YMO comment.

#### 7. Steely Dan "Your Gold Teeth II"

I'm Fagen for life. And again, Porcaro is totally killing it on this track. There's a YouTube clip of a nerdy teenage kid covering this on his lame keyboard, and he's kinda awesome.

#### 8. Laurie Spiegel "Appalachian Grove"

Laurie Spiegel is one of my favorite of the early electronic music composers. Along with people like Jean-Claude Risset, Alvin Lucier, Delia Derbyshire, Todd Dockstader, and of course Norman McLaren. I'm always amazed at how 'listenable' all that stuff is. Spiegel's stuff, in particular, is amazingly musical and often really beautiful and haunting.

#### 9. Steve Reich "Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ"

Yeah, nobody could escape the love-in for Steve Reich during his 70th birthday year. "An entire career built on one simple idea..." He always inspires me to throw in just one more arpeggio.

#### 10. Max Tundra "Which Song?"

I was played this at the Domino office a few months ago, and I totally flipped out. We are really excited to do some shows with him—should be a blast.



Check out some of the musical and visual inspirations for *Begone Dull Care* at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).



all  
that



chillers

PO-MO-GLAM PURVEYOR **POP LEVI** TALKS TO **SPARKS'** RUSSELL MAEL ABOUT THE BAND'S 21 ALBUMS AND 40 YEARS OF KEEPIN' IT WEIRD.

PHOTOS [MATHEW SCOTT](#) MODERATED BY [KEN TAYLOR](#)

It's safe to say that in today's major-label climate, a band like Sparks just wouldn't exist.

Brothers Russell and Ron Mael (a.k.a. Sparks) were glam before glam was even thought of (nearly 40 years ago). When the style finally came into favor in the late '70s, the Maels were already ironically turning it on its ear, deconstructing its pop elements and infusing them with classical song structures and time signatures, all while staging theatrical live shows—and somehow winning the favor of Bob Dylan's manager Albert Grossman and rock god Todd Rundgren along the way. When Sparks decided the "band" format had run its course (as early as the mid-'80s), they traded in their drummer and bassist for synths and electronic toys, and, with the help of Giorgio Moroder, took the dance-pop world by storm.

Meanwhile, in mid-'80s Liverpool, a young buck with an equally vibrant flair for the theatrical took notice of Sparks' moves. He turned into Pop Levi, a hippie-glam-lovin' indie-rock star, and, like Sparks, has made making and appearing in films and videos as much a part of his art as his abstract, lyrical pop. This past January, we got Pop on the horn with Russell Mael; they chatted about Sparks' ridiculously prolific career, and how the band has managed to keep it going strong 40 years later.  
*Ken Taylor*

**Pop Levi:** I was excited to talk to you because, about three weeks ago, the head of my label just coincidentally turned me onto what's become my favorite song of yours, "No. 1 Song in Heaven." I got into the video on YouTube and I just started watching loads of your videos. My favorite is the video that you allegedly made for 50 pence on [British TV show] TV-am, "Change." At the time, did you have any inkling that that would emerge to be as proper a video, at least in terms of what would come to be known as the internet, as any of the other videos you've made?

**Russell Mael:** No, not at all. We just did it because we didn't have a record label that saw the need to invest in doing a video at the time. It was just done out of desperation. We were put on a television show with unequal footing with everybody else, where everybody else had something tangible to show, [like] a performance of their latest song. So we just said, "Well, we'll create our own video just for that television show right on the spot."

**That's amazing because, 24 years later, I'm watching it and it's a genuine video in every way possible. It's brilliant.**

**[laughs]** Yeah, that's funny. Well, we never thought any more or less of it at the time. It was done out of desperation, as a lot of our stuff is.

**How old were you the first time you performed with your brother? When did you first realize there was that chemistry between you that would end up doing things like that?**

We were doing stuff together when we both went to UCLA, so that was in our late teens.

**This was in the '60s in L.A.?**

Yeah, well, late '60s.

**Who blew your mind the most of anybody that you saw?**

Well, we'd go to see lots of English bands that would come to L.A.... people like The Who and The Stones. We saw The Beatles, even, on two occasions.

**Wow, where did you see The Beatles?**

We had a kind mother that drove her little boys to the Hollywood Bowl to see them.

**And how soon after those days did you begin putting your own records out? How did the Halfnelson [Sparks' first incarnation] sessions begin?**

We were in a group together when we were both at UCLA and then we joined up with another guy—a guitarist—that also had similar sensibility to us named Earle Mankey. We would record all the time. He was good at the technical side of stuff, and wanted to experiment—you know, slowing down tapes and speeding up tapes and playing things backwards and all that stuff—but on a really primitive two-track recorder. We would bounce things back and forth between two recorders—he was real creative in that sort of way.

**The first recordings I made were on a Fostex four-track from the mid-'80s, and I was immediately into playing things backwards and taking them out and splicing bits and getting all sorts of things out of that. I'm into that kind of D.I.Y. approach.**

Yeah, it forces you to do things that are interesting just because of the limitations that you have. We kind of had a real primitive set up; it gave a real atmosphere to what we were doing. We made tapes and every record company turned down what we were doing and finally we gave one to Todd Rundgren. He was the only person that responded to what we were doing and he signed the band to his label and produced our first album.

**Was that still under the name Halfnelson?**

Yeah, that was still Halfnelson. It's the same album that was then repackaged as *Sparks*.



When was the last time you listened to that record?

Not that long ago. This past summer, we performed all 21 of our albums in concert, so we were actually forced to go back and listen to everything that we've ever done.

What was your favorite album to replay live at those London concerts?

A lot of them were really fun to rediscover. An album like [Sparks], that was not a "live" kind of band sound, was really interesting to try and recreate because we didn't want to update it—we wanted to be faithful to the original recordings.

I wanted to know about your move from L.A. to London in '73, because, about four years ago, I moved from Liverpool to L.A. in a kind of reverse move, which I would imagine would not be dissimilar in an opposite way. What was the biggest influence that England had on you and Sparks' music?

We had played once with that original band for one tour and the reaction to what we were doing was so much greater [in the U.K.] than it was here in L.A. We had been given this offer to go back to England and actually relocate Ron and myself and to reform our band and to try and make a go of it in England, and we signed with Island Records at the time.

Was that with Chris Blackwell?

Yeah, Chris Blackwell actually was responsible for us being there, so for us it was a real dream come true because we were such Anglophiles. We felt like we were not really a part of the L.A. scene even though we were born in L.A.

A move can really inspire things.

Yeah, you've got to make it work in some kind of way, and that's probably your feeling as well. You don't want to be here as a tourist; you want to do what you do.

I have a few questions about your own films and films you've been in. Last year I was in this documentary made in this style called "soul film," which is shot all on point-and-shoot cameras and cameras on phones, and we showed it at a silent movie theater here. I wanted to know what your experience was when you [were in the '70s thriller] Roller Coaster?

That thing is not something we're amazingly proud of—the film has sort of been haunting us forever... They were hoping it would be the next *Jaws*. It was the same company that put out *Jaws* so they were hoping they had another massive hit on their hands. It was successful, but not nearly the type of film *Jaws* was.

I haven't seen it actually.

It's got a lot of big stars: Henry Fonda, Richard Widmark, and George Segal. It was just something we were offered to be in.... We really like films a lot so we're hoping to be able to do a movie-musical at some point. It's something we've been working on for a long time. We're hoping to somehow make it see the light of day.

Are you quite involved in the direction of the subject matter or the way that your videos are filmed?

Yeah, for the most part. We have real strong views on what the stuff should be like and so we've been fortunate to find directors that also like what we are doing and like our ideas, too. And obviously if somebody has really good input we listen to it as well.

I was watching, like I said earlier, the video for "No. 1 Song in Heaven" and I guess I'd like to know about your relationship to Giorgio Moroder and Telex, what you felt about that time, and how it affected you and Sparks and the general outlook on your music.

We had quite a few albums out when we lived in England... [We had] six albums at the time. We thought that, just working in the traditional band format, we'd kind of run the course of what we could do at that time, so we were really trying to figure out how to utilize Ron's songwriting and his lyrics with my voice but to put it in a different context. We thought "I Feel Love," the Donna Summer thing, was just a really special song. We were curious to see what it would be like if we did a whole project where we were using a real electronic background, but coming from

a band sensibility. So we contacted Giorgio Moroder and he was aware of stuff that we had done before because of the European success that we had. So he was also up for the challenge of working with the band, because he had never worked with a band before (even though then we were just two people). So the three of us started that album not knowing exactly where it was gonna lead, but we all kind of went at it with a naïve and fresh sort of spirit. It really turned out to be something special because at that time there really weren't bands who were working in an electronic or more dance-y kind of format. There was Kraftwerk and stuff, but that was less of a band kind of sensibility—it was really a different kind of approach. We didn't know what it was when we had finished but, as it turned out, it was really a successful album in England and really influential in a lot of ways. It opened up other bands' ideas of what you can do—you know, that a duo can now be a band. A band didn't necessarily have to be five people with guitars, bass, and drums.



**Do you have a favorite album cover of yours?**

There's a lot of them that I like. I like *Kimono My House* just because it was sort of mysterious. It just has these two women dressed in traditional Japanese garb.

**Yeah, I love it. I love the back of it as well.**

Yeah, and the good thing was that the label had confidence that it was just going to break through and we said we didn't want to have any type on the front—not even saying who the band was. They went along with that, and now, to try and get things like that passed through any kind of committee, if you're with a major label or something, it's impossible. At that time, though, they could see that it really added to the band's mystique by not making things so obvious and blatant. We really have to hand it to them for allowing us to do things like that.



**What have you gained and what have you lost through a life in music?**  
I don't know. I think it's only gains. I can't think of anything that's been lost.

**That's super-positive, man. I like that.**  
Yeah, you never have to get old, in a certain way. You can be perpetually—at least in your own head—useful because of what you're doing. You're *doing* it, at least from our perspective... From our standpoint—I think my brother would say the same thing—we haven't lost anything by doing it. We think it's only been positive.

Sparks' *Exotic Creatures of the Deep* is out now on Lil' Beethoven. Pop Levi's *Never Never Love* is out now on Counter. [allsparks.com](http://allsparks.com), [poplevi.com](http://poplevi.com)

POP SINGLE SIDED  
LEVI'S SPARKS  
A B  
MIX TAPE

- "Equator"**  
Well, I always felt that I had quite a gift as a judge of human character... One of the most crucial opening lines. And the extended vocals at the end—never heard anything quite like it.
- "No. 1 Song in Heaven"**  
I got into this through the video—there are three Rons! Check it out. The song is some kind of electro-spirit dance-rock.
- "Beat the Clock"**  
Very, very, very, very catchy. Love it like a child's rhyme. I first heard this song on a covers compilation called *Stars on 45*, not by Sparks. And then I heard the original... both are gold.
- "Get in the Swing"**  
This is truly weird. Genius. Makes me think of Kurt Weill, Snow White, *Bandstand*, and a kind of pop music that doesn't really exist.
- "Big Boy"**  
From the *Big Beat* LP—I love, love, love the drum sound on this... then the best guitar splattering ever!

To read the full transcript of this interview, visit [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).

WEIRDO-POP MINISTER DAN DEACON THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET

AND PACKS ALL OF BALTIMORE INTO HIS LATEST DIY OPUS.

# ring

# leader

WORDS MICHAEL BYRNE PHOTOS JOSH SISK

Maybe you've been a part of this before:  
You can't see Dan Deacon, but you can hear him.  
He's set up on the floor in front of the stage (if there is one) surrounded by 180 degrees of obedient fans—likely they're teens, likely in the latest ADD thrift-store fashion—and Deacon's calling out instructions in an anxious yet commanding and familiar voice.

He's telling everyone to point their fingers down toward the ground. Now point at the sky! Now lower your arm, slowly, extend your finger, and point it directly at anyone not doing this. And, just like that, you've been (literally) fingered as a lamewad. How does it feel? In a room of 800 people, it doesn't feel good. Even assholes don't *really* like to be excluded.

To put it a certain way, Dan Deacon is very, very good at making people do shit. Like, say, making them leave a venue in the middle of a show. Everyone. The game is called "the gauntlet." The room gets split in two and audience members link hands in the air over the gap, forming a kind of bridge. Those at the front of this bridge-tunnel—those at the front of the room, that is—race underneath the arm bridges to the back. At the back, you're to pick a side and find someone to join hands with, thus becoming another link in the gauntlet. And, like that, the whole thing moves forward to wherever, occasionally outside... at least until the collective gets too big or too tired or too bored.

#### DEACON BRUISE

Since 2006, when Deacon's celebratory rush of tribalistic electronic pop, *Spiderman of the Rings*, arrived in a big surge of internet hype, mass actions like this have shifted from Deacon repertoire to Deacon lore. In 2008, you might even say the Dan Deacon live experience has eclipsed the Dan Deacon listening experience. Is listening to "Crystal Cat" now like a postcard of that time you *lived* "Crystal Cat" with an auditorium full of people? And this isn't the same as being let down by a recording of a great live band.

At a Deacon show you were a part of it; for 45 minutes you were a part of this intense, spontaneous community. With strangers. And how often does that happen?

It's not even like dance music or a club full of 4/4s and great drugs. It's the opposite of that. Dance music is cherished, rightly, as a sort of cultural safeguard of community, that thing that a thousand people can get behind at the drop of a kick drum. But this is more—it has goals, it's about involvement. Since when has being a cog felt so good? As Deacon explains it, the audience is "something that can be composed for and improvised with, manipulated in the most positive sense into doing something they wouldn't normally do."

#### SURREALITY CHECK

A few days into 2009, I'm sitting on a couch in the third-floor living room of Dan Deacon's Baltimore rowhouse. We're just across the bridge from the Copycat building, the labyrinthine warehouse that housed the Wham City collective until a couple of years ago. A few beer bottles are scattered around, left over from a goodbye party the night before for a member of the Lexie Mountain Boys, an acapella-cum-performance-art outfit that really has to be seen to be properly understood.

Understand that Baltimore has the sort of music community where everyone tends to know everyone. Rifts are scarce; competition is a non-issue; egos are generally "kept in check," as Deacon puts it. If you feel excluded in Baltimore, it's probably because you're either shy or a dick.

The city's lack of hierarchy makes Deacon a strange thing, a star in a town that doesn't

foster fame. Talking with him, it's hard to tell if Deacon understands the measure of his success or if he's just being coy. In either case, he's disarmingly nice and earnest, and you get the impression he wouldn't be too bummed out if only 30 people bought his new album, which, by the way, is called *Bromst* and is the sort of entry into an artist's catalog that propels them to mass exposure. I tell this to Deacon, and he doesn't seem to believe it, naturally.

The record is different from anything he's done since studying composition at SUNY Purchase, and he's worried it will be alienating to his fans. *Spiderman of the Rings* is a great album—and probably hasn't been taken seriously enough—but its rep is as a party record. The vocals are dialed to chipmunk pitch; the synths are tweaked to cartoon-y levels; even the slow songs sound like accompaniments to nursery rhymes, complete with happy endings—it out-Quintrons Mr. Quintron, without even using puppets.

#### A.D.D. IT UP

Then there's the expectation of those shows—their constant energy demands the constant energy of the album that birthed them. And *Bromst* doesn't deliver that energy, at least not non-stop. The record functions more as a narrative. Deacon wants you to chill out and stand still for a minute and listen to it. And are the kids in the gauntlet *listening* to "Crystal Cat?" Maybe not so much. "It'll be exciting to see if the people that got into my last record because it was... easy to party to, whether they'll be into the record that sort of demands more of the listener." He pauses again and adds,





"I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF ESOTERIC ANYTHING.



I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF SECRET KNOWLEDGE OR SUPPRESSED IDEAS OR  
NOT ALLOWING A NON-EDUCATED AUDIENCE TO LISTEN.

THAT'S THE DEATH OF CULTURE."



Dan Deacon's 10 Really Surprised Pieces Mixtape

A

B

1. Neil Young "Out on the Weekend"  
It's just a beautiful song for when you are feeling a little down and want to stay that way. In the chorus, the electric guitar plays only one note several times. I love that.
2. Salt-N-Pepa "Shoop"  
I was in seventh-grade science class and some girls sitting around me started singing this and I was thinking how badly I wanted to sing along but I thought they would just laugh at me. But when they got to the dude's verse, I couldn't help it and I just busted it out. It was beautiful.
3. Gamelan Jegog Werdi Sentana "Tabuh Gegenderan"  
I don't know what to write about this other than it's utterly beautiful and totally fucking awesome.
4. Das Racist "Combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell"  
A track that will last the ages.
5. Arab on Radar "Piggin' in the Pumpkin Patch"  
The extended dialog between the two guitars in the intro is exactly what I want to hear guitars do—always.
6. Inuit Throat Singing "Katajjait"  
A really incredible display of the human voice.
7. Future Islands "Little Dreamer"  
This track should be a classic. The vocals just float atop the perfect bass and keyboards. One of my favorite songs from a current band.
8. La Monte Young "Dream House"  
I wonder how different pop music would be if Kurt Cobain was photographed wearing a La Monte Young t-shirt?
9. Lou Christie "Lightnin' Strikes"  
Some of the most horrifying lyrics ever. The build leading up to the chorus sounds like overhearing a horrible crime. But that beautiful falsetto makes up for it.
10. Simon and Garkfunkel "So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright"  
I used to fucking hate this song so much. But this summer I listened to this album everyday and by mid-July it was by far my favorite song on the album.

"I FEEL LIKE THE AMERICAN MENTALITY IS THAT BIGGER IS BETTER, AND I GOT CAUGHT UP IN THAT FOR A WHILE."

laughing. "[But] I'm not saying it's, like, a challenge that only the strongest of minds can comprehend."

In a way, it does demand more, if only in attention. *Bromst* has been in progress since Deacon started writing the songs on *Spiderman of the Rings*, intended as sort of compositional outlet that Spidey wasn't serving. "I didn't want to do another electronic album," he decided. And after the quick success of *Spiderman*, he remembers thinking, "I'm in this position now where I think I can get people to play my music. I think I can record it properly."

It took a player piano on a mountaintop for Deacon to realize that, yes, he could make *Bromst* work. Touring the U.S. in summer of 2007, he played a show in Whitefish, Montana, a small mountain town lapping at the edge of Glacier National Park. The show was at Snowghost Studios, where the likes of Matmos, Christopher Willits, and Death Cab for Cutie have recorded in the past. At the space, Deacon found a player piano, remarkable not so much for being a player piano but for being equipped with MIDI capabilities. So, here it was, this thing that could perform the piano parts he'd composed, when he thought they would have to be sampled. "Instantly I knew I had to come back to Snowghost and record pieces for that piano," he says.

So, he enlisted his friends. Drummer Kevin O'Meara—a Wham City collective member and drummer for Deacon's *Ultimate Reality* and Butt Stomach side-projects—and his dad, Rich O'Meara, rearranged the marimba parts on the record (of which there are many) so they'd be suitable for performance by actual human beings. Andy Abelow, a solo out-folk songwriter, performed the horn parts. Members of Ponytail and Ecstatic Sunshine played guitar. Chester Gwazda of Nuclear Power Pants produced the record. To perform the album live takes between 12 and 15 people and they're all from the same Baltimore circle Deacon has been collaborating with, and organizing, since he was writing songs with titles like "Moses vs. Predator" and "Breast Cake/Penis Sleeve."

WHARTS AND ALL

*Bromst* is enormous. It *sounds* a bit more like a Dan Deacon show *feels* than the self-contained electronics of *Spiderman*—that is, it feels human, three-dimensional, vulnerable. Plans for touring the record take it even further. Why not *really* open up the performance? Almost as an aside, Deacon brings up his scheme to print and distribute sheet music for *Bromst* to record stores along his touring route, and further put the parts online as PDF files—in short, every city would be able to provide its own Deacon orchestra. (He compares it to Daniel Johnston's touring program, but it seems like he's underestimating himself—rock band vs. small avant-

garde symphony?) "I think approaching everything like it's a disaster waiting to happen is the way to do it," Deacon says. "I think that makes it more exciting for the audience, when it's always teetering. If it falls over it would suck, but if it goes the right way... it would be awesome."

At this point we've moved onto talking about Whartscape and the Baltimore Round Robin tour, which share a similar ethos. Whartscape, a tiny festival of friends and friends' bands, is the crown jewel of the Wham City collective, a group of visual artists, performers, and musicians that moved *en masse* to Baltimore from SUNY Purchase in 2004; now in its fourth year, Whartscape has turned into a destination event for art-rocking youngsters all over the East Coast. The third edition spanned three days and three nights, four venues, and roughly 50 performers, starting formally in an art-house movie theater and ending with the Baltimore police busting up a packed dance party in a 100-plus-degree warehouse space. The Round Robin tour is roughly the condensed version—as many Baltimore performers as possible crammed onto three veggie-oil-powered school buses for a two-week tour of the Eastern U.S. and Canada, performing two nights in each city in the round style (no sets, no openers, no headliners).

Both are feats of do-it-yourself organizational acumen, and it's the sort of thing that drives Deacon. "Just seeing people try ideas that they wouldn't normally try and making that project a vessel for that," he says, "that's the sort of mentality I like. The group of people that don't really know what they're doing but are confident enough to convince themselves that they can... and then the humbling process of realizing that they've taken on more than they can."

This all makes Deacon's standing in the music world oddly precarious. The ability to maintain these communities and projects seems to be contingent on a flourishing, and interested, underground. If *Bromst* is *that* record, the one that shoots him to the moon, what does it mean for these things he's helped create? "I feel like the American mentality is that bigger is better," he says, "and I got caught up in that for a while, but I think this size is best. I'd like it to stay where it is."

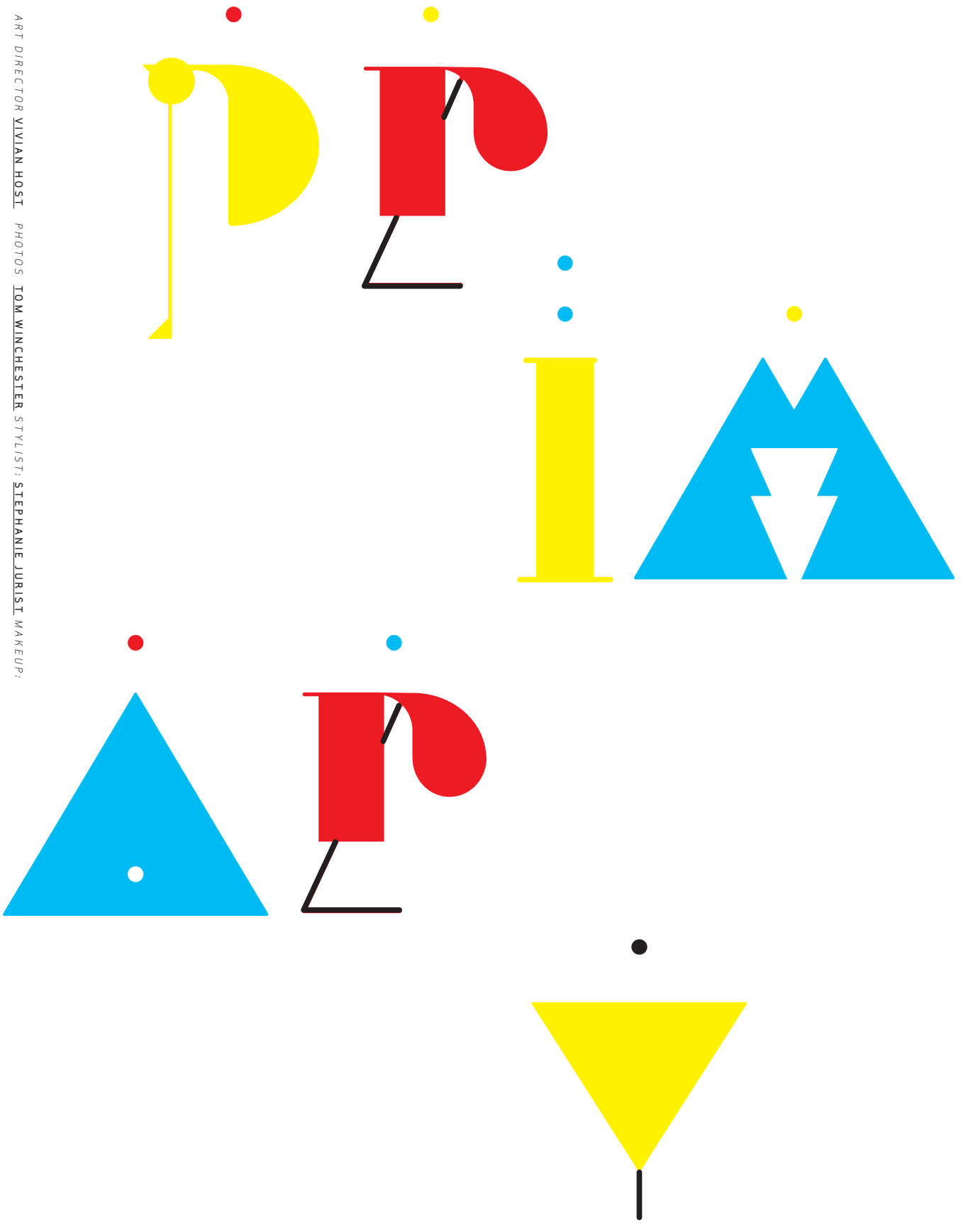
"But I hope [all the people who] enjoy the music can come to the show," he adds. "I don't like the idea of esoteric anything. I don't like the idea of secret knowledge or suppressed ideas or not allowing a non-educated audience to listen. That's the death of culture."

Dan Deacon's *Bromst* is out now on Carpark. [dandeacon.com](http://dandeacon.com)

More with Dan Deacon on XLR8R TV at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).



SSD SL SHIRT, MODEL'S OWN PANTS, SCHMOOVE SHOES, NECKLACE FROM  
PIXIE MARKET, STYLIST'S OWN SUSPENDERS.



ART DIRECTOR: VIVIAN HOSI. PHOTOS: TOM WINCHESTER. STYLIST: STEPHANIE JURIST. MAKEUP:  
DANA JAMES. DIGITAL TECHNICIAN: ANNIE POWERS. RETOUCHING: JOSEPH WINCHESTER.  
LIGHTING TECHNICIAN: JON CARROLL. PHOTO ASSISTANT: AYALA GAZIT.



JUDD ROSEN DRESS, IRRREGULAR CHOICE SHOES, HUE TIGHTS,  
STYLIST'S OWN JEWELRY AND GLOVES.



PERKS AND MINI SHIRT, JUDD ROSEN SKIRT AND HAIR BOW, HUE TIGHTS,  
STYLIST'S OWN BELT, BRACELET, AND SHOES.





ROJAS CARDIGAN, ACID HAUS T-SHIRT, AMERICAN APPAREL PANTS,  
SCHMOOVE SHOES.



AMERICAN APPAREL CARDIGAN, MISHKA T-SHIRT, SDSL PANTS,  
SCHMOOVE SHOES, STYLIST'S OWN BELT.



PREEN DRESS, IRREGULAR CHOICE SHOES, NANCY GONZALEZ BELT,  
ZEPHYRAS TIGHTS, STYLIST'S OWN GLOVES.



SAMANTHA PLEET JUMPSUIT, IRREGULAR CHOICE SHOES,  
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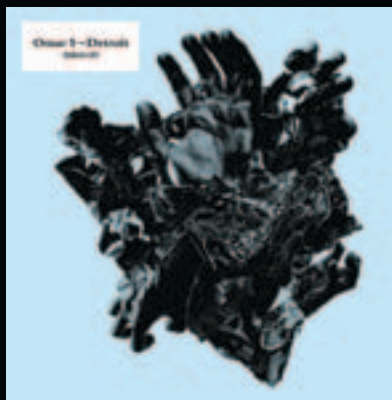
John Tejada  
fabric 44  
Available: Out Now

On fabric 44, John Tejada swoops in and swells with a deep, pulsating mix that swallows the listener whole. Breeding energetic beats amongst beautifully woven layers and intricate patterns, the mix hypnotises and stuns with complex sonic artistry. A dense masterclass in melodic techno, fabric 44 features the driving feel of the Palette All Stars (Tejada himself with frequent collaborators Arian Leviste and Justin Maxwell), the distinct rhythmic stomp of Orbital, slick harmonics from Beatstreet's Pigeon, and Tejada's own synth-heavy bleeps, all wrapped in a warm electronic embrace.



Commix  
FABRICLIVE 44  
Available: 03.10.09

FABRICLIVE44 proves Commix are a behemoth to behold, both behind the spinning metal plates and in the selectors' booth, creating a sublimely flowing collection of tracks that boldly explores the deeper end of the drum n bass spectrum. Serving up a mix that dances and shimmers across the 160bpm template, the intricately melodic journey features heavyweight cuts with the succinct drama of D-Bridge's triple hi-hat underpinned harmonies, the understated impact of Spectrasoul's low-end frequencies and a little of Instra:mental's Bladerunner halfstep all heavily involved in its impact.



Omar S-Detroit  
fabric 45  
Available: 04.07.09

On "fabric 45: Omar S Detroit," composed solely of his own productions, Omar S provides the uneducated with a stunning, arresting portrait of who he is as an artist, as a DJ, as an outsider, as a radical in an otherwise indifferent music world. Enter the wide, unformulaic world of Alex Omar Smith, where all rules of techno and house are contorted, and no directions can ever be predicted. His complex yet austere productions build and interlock individually, in the same way they bind collectively to form a fluid, surreal anthology. Deep, challenging and all-consuming, fabric 45 is aural poetry, atmospheric bliss: put simply, a work of art.



A-Trak  
FABRICLIVE 45  
Available: 05.05.09

On FABRICLIVE 45, A-Trak (scratch champion, Fool's Gold boss, tour DJ for Kanye West and international sound hustler) slams down an unrivaled blend of everything hot in clubland today. A blazing mix decked-out with scratches and tricks aplenty, A-Trak cuts up with the freshest and funkier edge of 4/4. A seamless, cleverly formed mish - mash of genres and sounds - bringing the new school house beats of his own Fool's Gold back catalogue up against classic house records, and teasing in unexpected gems alongside the bounce of Bmore club and the bang of ghetototech - FABRICLIVE 45 is the epitome of a classic DJ mix.

Forthcoming: Claude VonStroke, Toddla T



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# ALBUM REVIEWS

3/09



PHOTO TAKAHIRO IMAMURA

## FEVER RAY

*Fever Ray*

Mute/US/CD



THE KNIFE'S KARIN DREIJER ANDERSSON SLOWS THINGS DOWN ON HER SOLO DEBUT.

Hiatuses just don't work for everyone. After The Knife's *Silent Shout* exploded and became one of the most celebrated albums of 2006, the brother/sister duo of Olaf Dreijer and Karin Dreijer Andersson were supposed to take a break. After all, Andersson had her second baby on the way. Apparently, she didn't get the message because she just kept on writing, eventually winding up with a batch of songs that would become *Fever Ray*.

Not surprisingly, *Fever Ray* isn't a grand departure from The Knife. Andersson's otherworldly vocals, and the litany of effects used to make them sound as alien as possible, continue to haunt her solo debut. *Fever Ray*'s stark, gothic synths certainly sound familiar, as does the occasional flourish of traditional rock instrumentation. Given that half the album was produced with the assistance of Knife mixer Christoffer Berg (the other half was produced by fellow Swedes Van River & The Subliminal Kid), the sonic similarities aren't exactly shocking.

That said, *Fever Ray* is no retreat. Where albums like *Silent Shout* and *Deep Cuts* were grandiose, genre-defining efforts, *Fever Ray* is decidedly restrained and downbeat. Listeners won't find any high-energy techno flirtations here—*Fever Ray* is more like The Knife on Quaaludes. Lead single "If I Had a Heart" features a humming synth, virtually no percussion, and vocals that rarely rise above a growl. Another icy number is "Concrete Walls," whose ominous vocals have been pitched down and warped to a point where they barely register as human. Similarly spooky is "Dry and Dusty," although the track's lilting melodies

and plinking beats do manage to pick up the pace a little bit.

While all this may lend the impression that *Fever Ray* is some sort of dour mope-fest, some of its best moments happen when Andersson dials down the emotional detachment. Where The Knife's experimentation with processed vocals only enhanced their eerie aesthetic, *Fever Ray* shines brightest when Andersson sounds more human. "Grow Up" is downright emotive, with the vocals soaring alongside a plucky bassline and playful keys. "Seven" could be mistaken for a lost ballad from Madonna or some other '80s dance queen, while the chiming synths and swirling melodies of "Triangle Walk" sound like something Siouxsie and The Banshees would have dreamed up. A truly unexpected delight is "Keep the Streets Empty for Me," a sonically stripped-down offering that easily qualifies as the most organic thing on the record. With its gently strummed acoustic guitar, untreated vocals, and simple arrangement, the song recalls the more delicate moments of someone like Polly Jean Harvey.

Comparisons to other artists aside, it's all but impossible to examine *Fever Ray* without looking through the prism of Andersson's previous output. While she may have scaled things down in terms of scope and set the sensor to pensive, *Fever Ray* retains real emotional heft. Andersson knows that storming the dancefloor isn't always necessary; sometimes it's fun to play it cool and twirl quietly in the corner.

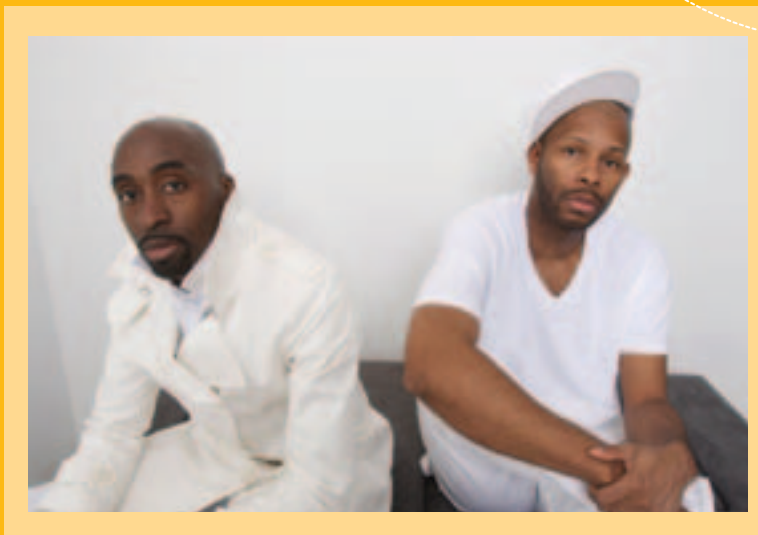
Shawn Reynaldo

# PLATINUM PIED PIPERS

## Abundance

Ubiquity/US/CD

Three years after their critically acclaimed debut, Motor City thoroughbreds Waajeed and Saadiq deliver a sophomore release in a surprisingly about-face fashion. The duo all but abandons its hip-hop leanings here for a decidedly R&B/soul sound. With melodious vocal assists from new recruits such as St. Louis native Coultrain, Texas songstress Karma Stewart, and Brooklynite Jamila Raegan, *Abundance* brazenly explores Latin-soul fusion (“The Ghost of Aveiro”), Charles Stepney-esque balladry (“Sanctuary”), and throwback soul (“On a Cloud”). *Abundance* also finds PPP introspecting, engaging in sociopolitical commentary (“American Pimp”), and musing on the proliferation of poseurs and culture vultures (“Smoking Mirrors”). Although fans of the duo’s MPC boom-bap may be left scratching their heads, PPP’s allegiance to the groove should soothe all doubts. *Rico “Superbizzee” Washington*



### AFRICAN SCREAM CONTEST

Analog Africa/GER/CD

On this terribly overdue comp of ’70s funk from Benin and Togo, curator Samy Ben Redjeb documents some of the best footprints that James Brown left on West African groove. The infusion of the Godfather’s screeching energy and locked grooves is ripe in the Beninese dance rhythm on Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou’s “Gbeti Madjro.” Elsewhere, Picoby Band D’Abomey’s frenetic breakbeats and lightly distorted vocals achieve a fine psychedelic grace, while the Discafric Band produces ace robotic funk from deadpan chants and a hypnotic, bare-bones rhythm. It’s sad that so few outsiders have discovered these gems until now.

*Cameron Macdonald*

### BKLYN: HEAVY SOUNDS FROM THE COUNTY OF KINGS

Bastard Jazz/CD/US

By the time *The Real World* comes to town, it’s usually a safe bet that a city has jumped the shark. Yet this compilation proves that not even MTV reality shows can ruin Brooklyn’s music scene. Dispensing with over-hyped indie rock, *BKLYN* focuses on the borough’s Afro-Latin, soul, funk, and dub sounds. A few big names show up: Sharon Jones and The Dap-Kings contribute the love-soaked “How Long Do I Have to Wait;” Nickodemus drops “Conmigo,” pitting Puerto Rican vocalist Sammy Ayala against a deep groove; and reunited ’70s Brazilian soul band Uniao Black even make an appearance. But lesser-known artists also represent, from the excellently named Latin soulsters The Pimps of Joytime to the 13-piece Akoya Afrobeat Ensemble. *Luciana Lopez*

### CAZALS

#### WHAT OF OUR FUTURE

The Hours/US/CD

One might expect a more schizophrenic offering from a band that rolls with Daft Punk, Pete Doherty, and Kanye West, but Kitsune’s new sweethearts Cazals play it straight on their guitar-driven debut full-length, *What of Our Future*. The London five-piece balances retro-pop melodies reminiscent of XTC with DJ-minded fist-pump breakaways and a gritty garage edge. “To Cut a Long Story Short” is a classic dance-punk number, with vocals that relax from a rough grain into something approaching Elvis Costello. “Comfortable Silence” is darker, featuring opaque synths, high-pitched xylophone, computerized back-up vocals, and bass so low as to be almost inaudible. While these and other tracks stand on their own, they’re especially ripe for remixing. *Lulu McAllister*

### DÄLEK

#### GUTTER TACTICS

Ipecac/US/CD

With its fluctuating sound, industrial-strength avant duo Dälek has often been hailed as an ambient group destined to change the face of hip-hop. Are they still the same genre-changing outfit? Their style has certainly changed once again, this time resembling angry shoegaze tinged with turntablism and experimental beats. Politically charged lyrics infuse the music with a certain energy, but many of them are lost in hard-to-ignore production tactics that leave certain verses all but inaudible underneath the album’s rattling beats—(“No Question” is a particularly difficult listen). Although digging beneath the layers of raw sound just might yield something solid, *Gutter Tactics* is nothing that will transform the future of hip-hop. *Brigid Moore*

### TAYLOR DEUPREE & KENNETH KIRSCHNER

MAY

Room40/AUST/CD

Recorded live in May 2008 at the OFFF Festival in Portugal, *May* is the premier live release for these two Brooklyn-based ambient experimentalists. Laptops at the ready, they “explore” the grand piano from the inside out (literally), digitally processing their findings on the fly and subsequently creating a supremely mesmerizing and perpetually morphing soundscape. Rich acoustic tonality disintegrates into waves of manipulated antimatter, spreading outward to embrace subsequent ivory transmissions in what becomes a cyclical push-pull of organic and synthetic textures. Fans of Taylor’s 12k and line labels will find all the subtle, shoe-gazing fragility they can wrap their egg-like heads around, although any inkling of this being a “live” recording will elude even them. *Doug Morton*

### DJ SPRINKLES

#### MIDTOWN 120 BLUES

Mule Music/JPN/CD

The comma of a warm, undulating chord wash, the semi-colon of a synthesized energy pulse; there are no full stops or harsh question marks imposed by the Balearic bounty of *Midtown 120 Blues*. I’d imagine that Sprinkles (a.k.a. ambient mastermind/raconteur Terre Thaemlitz) would see anything more than an ellipsis as vulgar within house music. And it’s within that open-ended territory that *Midtown*’s beauty lies. Where house went wrong, Thaemlitz seems to say, is in filling speakers with activity rather than possibilities. A track like “House Music is Controllable Desire You Can Own” is the kind of song that reminds us that house music subtly changed the world. *Justin Hopper*

### FABRIC 44: JOHN TEJADA

Fabric/UK/CD

As the minimal techno onslaught continues to lull dancefloors to sleep, it’s nice to see a legend like John Tejada step up and show everyone where the genre should be going. *Fabric 44* is yet another high-quality entry in the celebrated mix series, and it finds Tejada seamlessly blending track after track of high-energy, electro-infused techno. Not surprisingly, the mix includes several synth-heavy entries from his own Palette label, although when Tejada does reach for something he didn’t have a hand in producing, it’s always an ace selection like Orbital’s playful classic “Fahrenheit 303.” Precise without being boring, fun without being silly, *Fabric 44* is a techno blueprint well worth following. *Shawn Reynaldo*

### FAUNTS

#### FEEL.LOVE.THINKING.OF.

Friendly Fire/US/CD

Alberta, Canada is hardly known for its indie rock, but that’s changing with the emergence of bands like Women, Azeda Booth, and Faunts. The latter five-piece, based in Edmonton, has been crafting spacious, airy soundscapes since 2000. *Feel.Love.Thinking.Of.*, their second full-length, builds retro synth-pop from shimmering guitars and fluttery keys; like M83’s latest, the songs are worthy of a John Hughes soundtrack. While the title track’s hammering beats and vocoders raise a red flag, “It Hurts Me All the Time” is all heartfelt pop and gloomy melody, and syncopated instrumentals like “Das Malefitz” are filled with echoing guitars and chiming synths. Instead of hiding shitty songs behind bleeps and retro futurism, Faunts delivers a diverse and, more importantly, memorable album. *Josiah Hughes*



PHOTO LARS BORGES

### FILASTINE

#### DIRTY BOMB

Soot/US/CD

With ears increasingly opening to the emerging electronic sounds of the third world, globetrotting beatmaker Filastine should have been poised to make a gritty, bass-heavy, sonically multicultural opus. Instead, *Dirty Bomb* is a bit of a schizophrenic mish-mash. With sounds from the Middle East, Latin America, the Balkans, and beyond, it’s clear that Filastine went to great lengths to cull samples and collaborate with artists from the far corners of the planet. Yet that only makes his failure to synthesize that raw material more disappointing. Even on tracks where the dubstep-flavored production is on point (“B’talla,” “Con Los Manos En La Masa”), the guest vocalists’ sub-par performances quickly sour things. *August Howard*

### TIM HECKER

#### AN IMAGINARY COUNTRY

Kranky/US/CD

*An Imaginary Country* finds Tim Hecker exploring brand new tonal territory, not to mention some nasty emotional nether regions. Eschewing the trademark gnarled guitar streams of his previous work, he instead opts for a heavily processed Mellotron organ and a frosty sense of doom. The pace is quick, the melodies are distant, and the results are unsettlingly beautiful. It’s as though the album was conceived of, written for, and performed alone in a Gothic cathedral... during a nuclear winter. Not that *An Imaginary Country* isn’t a lovely record—Hecker’s music has always been beautifully haunting. His latest offering only proves that he’s found yet another way to send a chill down our spines. *Tim Saputo*

### LARS HORNTVETH

#### KALEIDOSCOPIC

Smalltown Supersound/NOR/CD

The simple fact that *Kaleidoscopic* consists of a single, 37-minute composition makes this an intimidating record. Admittedly striving for grandiosity, Horntveth has created something that, purely in terms of scope, quickly surpasses his debut album, *Pooka*, and his usual work with Jaga Jazzist. This is post-rock writ large... and created in collaboration with the 41 members of the Latvian National Orchestra. Yet this is no classical bore—more akin to a film score, the emotive string arrangements, serene clarinet melodies, and other orchestral flourishes beautifully fill out the composition. More than anything, *Kaleidoscopic* is a pleasant listen—kudos to Horntveth for going big without going over the top. *Shawn Reynaldo*

# JESSE ROSE

## What Do You Do If You Don’t?

Dubside/UK/CD

The album begins with Hot Chip spelling out R-O-S-E, and the goofball antics have only just begun. Already recognized as one of house music’s biggest talents, Jesse Rose has elected to devote his debut artist album to demonstrating just how fun, and funny, dance music can be. Produced with the help of his fidget-house partner-in-crime Switch, *What Do You Do If You Don’t?* is simply bursting with gregarious energy, not to mention enough tweaked synths to keep listeners twisting and turning across the dancefloor for days. “Touch My Horn” carves up a brass section and spits out an acid-house monster, while “Well Now” throws an antique blues stomp over a bouncing beat. Tracks like “Pop Your Porn” and “Wine Gum” are pure jackin’ house workouts, and Rose was also smart enough to include a couple of his past floor-fillers—“Asided” and “You’re All Over My Head.” Simply put, this is F-U-N. *Shawn Reynaldo*

### BEN KLOCK

#### ONE

Ostgut Ton/GER/CD

After more than a decade spent catering to Berlin’s club scene, DJ and producer Ben Klock has finally dropped his first full-length album. Although accustomed to tailoring his sound to the dancefloor, Klock utilizes his debut as an opportunity to depart from his usual techno milieu. “Coney Island” enters a beautiful, but lonely, ambient space before being hit by a rhythmic storm of tense chords and so many layers that it becomes hard to locate the downbeat. “Goldrush” dabbles in the dubstep arena, while the throbbing, sinister “OK” drips Elif Bicer’s honeyed vocals on top of dark synths and the kind of club beat for which Klock is known. *Lulu McAllister*

### THE LAFAYETTE AFRO-ROCK BAND

#### DARKEST LIGHT: THE BEST OF THE LAFAYETTE AFRO-ROCK BAND

Strut/UK/CD

Even in the chock-full annals of rare-groove samples, The Lafayette Afro-Rock Band looms large. You don’t have to be a hip-hop head to recognize the opening sax on “Darkest Light,” made into a cultural milestone by Public Enemy and a thousand followers. But there’s a reason crate-diggers latched onto Lafayette albums—these 1970s U.S.-to-Paris transplants were churning out some of the funkiest records in the Western world. Influenced by their North African-immigrant neighborhood, Lafayette helped spawn an entire industry of neo-Afro beats for everyone from Chuck D to Wu-Tang. *Darkest Light* puts all of Lafayette’s best-known (and best) tracks on one CD, which should delight those unwilling to shell out \$100 for an original LP. *Justin Hopper*

### ELIOT LIPP

#### PEACE LOVE WEED 3D

Old Tacoma/US/CD

Eliot Lipp’s premiere release on his newly formed Old Tacoma imprint is another solid step forward for this Brooklyn-based synth specialist. Originally recorded to analog tape and then tweaked, these beats are retro and, at times, risky. “Sentinel” is among the best of the bunch, blending 8-bit arcade blips, snappy synths, and tribal-minded riddims into one concrete cut. Lipp does get too carried away with sound effects on tracks like “Glowstick,” but he balances things out with a little live instrumentation on the dusty electro-funk-tinged “Sandcastle”—one of the most multi-layered numbers here. For the bulk of this LP, the beat scientist manages to make the old sound brand new again. *Max Herman*



# TELEPATHE

*Dance Mother*

IAMSOUND/US/CD

*Dance Mother* is a record that might prompt snarky thoughts of “Wow, anyone can be in a band these days.” After all, Telepathe’s Melissa Livaudais and Busy Gangnes aren’t particularly gifted vocalists, and their music is often a sparse collection of synth bleeps and drum-machine beats. That’s not to say that *Dance Mother* is a bad album—on the contrary, the Brooklyn duo’s debut full-length is a rather charming affair. From the Gary Numan-esque electro-pop of “So Fine” to the swirling synth shoegaze of “Can’t Stand It,” Telepathe knows its strengths and doesn’t overreach. Producer David Sitek (and his collection of analog synths) helps ensure that Telepathe sounds great—somehow the spare arrangements, unpolished vocal harmonies, and odd lyrical choices (there are a lot of unexpected “fucks”) all work. Maybe anyone could have made this record, but Telepathe did make it, and it’s a good one. *August Howard*



PHOTO ANDREAS LASZLO KONRATH

## LOTUS PLAZA

**THE FLOODLIGHT COLLECTIVE**

Kranky/US/CD

Although Deerhunter frontman Bradford Cox’s oddball antics may snag all the headlines, much of the band’s signature swirling reverb can be traced back to guitarist Lockett Pundt. *The Floodlight Collective* is Pundt’s debut solo album, and Deerhunter fans will be delighted to know that Lotus Plaza is powered by a similar brand of shoegazing psychedelia. Yet this is much more than a retreat—simply put, *The Floodlight Collective* is a gorgeous album filled with seemingly endless melodies that glide, drip, and melt into one another. While Pundt does sing on the record (quite nicely), his vocals are often purposely buried in the mix, ultimately registering as just another harmonic hum in a warm sea of spacey pop sounds. *Shawn Reynaldo*

## MADLIB

**BEAT KONDUCTA VOL. 5-6**

Stones Throw/US/CD

Once a Beat Konducta, always a Beat Konducta. Madlib’s fifth and sixth installment of the *Beat Konducta* series most definitely delivers, especially to fans of the producer’s ongoing beat-tape opus. Produced with the help of Stones Throw comrade J Rocc as a tribute to the late J Dilla, the 42-track album comes exactly three years after Dilla’s death and sounds like it could have been an addition to his 2006 epic, *Donuts*. Characterized by Madlib’s witty arrangements and sample choices, *Beat Konducta Vol. 5-6* is loaded with all the grimy charm, dusty string sections, and ‘70s slow-jam interludes one would expect—it’s more of the same from Madlib, but that’s not a bad thing. *Brigid Moore*

## MAUS HAUS

**LARK MARVELS**

Pretty Blue Presents/US/CD

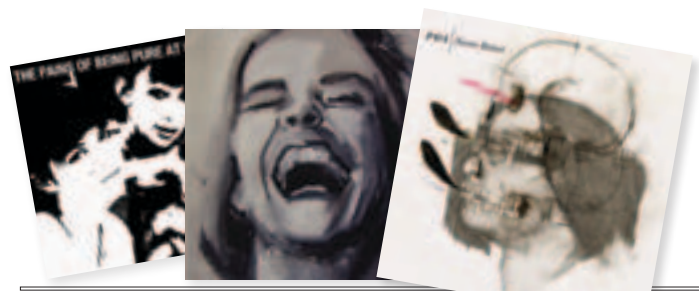
Although the number of ‘60s throwback bands has undoubtedly reached the thousands, few outfits pay homage to early electronic pioneers like Silver Apples and The United States of America. Enter Maus Haus, a San Francisco sextet whose offbeat brand of mod-pop eschews guitars in favor of whirring vintage synths and oddball orchestral flourishes. Birthed during a series of impromptu jam sessions, a few songs on Lark Marvels veer toward unfocused wonk, but overall, the band’s sound is refreshingly loose and unpolished. “We Used Technology (But Technology Let Us Down)” recalls the deadpan moop of Grandaddy, while the album standouts “Rigid Breakfast” and “Reception” feature psychedelic freakouts worth remembering. *Shawn Reynaldo*

## MI AMI

**WATERSPORTS**

Touch and Go/US/CD

A Rorschach drawing of D.C. noise-punks Black Eyes’ musical oeuvre would surely prompt a slew of one-word responses—from standards (“fiendish,” “misanthropic”) to the made-up (“bloodfugue,” “seminalstained”). One that few would offer is “focused,” and that is why San Francisco noise-groove trio Mi Ami, which includes two ex-Eyes, is such a revelation. On *Watersports*, squeal-screamed vocals and melodic randomness remain from the Black Eyes aesthetic, but here we find an aggressively consistent rhythm—a dubby drum-and-bass tandem that harkens more to Fela main-man Tony Allen than the Reverb Motherfuckers. Single “Echononecho” sets course along



this road, with the rhythms aided by guitars that recall pedal-laden *likembe* (à la Konono N°1), occasionally veering towards noisy rock outbursts. *Watersports* is a concise start to an already unconventional career. *Justin Hopper*

## MR. OIZO

**LAMBS ANGER**

Ed Banger/FRA/CD

While the electro-hipster set may worship at the altar of Justice, let the record show that another French artist has been serving up hard-edged electro bangers for more than a decade. 1999’s “Flat Beat” may have put Mr. Oizo on the international dance map, but *Lamb’s Anger* shows that the man has not lost a step. Blasting through 17 tracks in 44 minutes, Oizo occasionally cranks the distortion knob like his Ed Banger brethren (“Positif,” “Erreur Jean”), but he’s just as effective when he veers from the now-standard electro script. “Cut Dick” features a bouncing bassline and funky horn riff, “Jo” is a chopped-up disco exercise, and “Bruce Willis Is Dead” and “Gay Dentists” celebrate old-school rave and hardcore. *Shawn Reynaldo*

## MYKA 9

**1969**

Fake Four/US/CD

If they handed out Grammys for Lifetime Achievement in Keeping Hip-Hop Artistically Interesting, South Central street savant Myka 9 would surely have himself a statue. Myka’s scat-like delivery and alliterative phrasing have made him a purist’s purist. He’s beyond “true school”—“jazz” or “zen” more aptly describe his approach to the verbal arts. The same dedication to creative wordsmithing and soulful conceptualism he displayed on the classic Freestyle Fellowship albums is still evident on his latest solo album, *1969*. Highlights include “Soul Beat,” “Snake Bite,” “Options” (with Aceyalone), and “Chopper” (with Busdriver), but the entire album is further proof that L.A. hip-hop isn’t limited to pimp talk and Crip walks. *Eric K. Arnold*

## N.A.S.A.

**THE SPIRIT OF APOLLO**

Anti-/US/CD

While the producers behind *The Spirit of Apollo*—Spike Jonze’s little bro Sam Spiegel and Brazil’s DJ Zégon—are certainly competent beatsmiths with an impressive roldex, their debut album is a bloated, unfocused collection of bland hip-hop and WTF? moments that only occasionally reflects the boys’ shared love of vintage Brazilian funk and soul. Even with help from a-list rappers (Kanye West, Method Man, E-40), hipster darlings (M.I.A., Karen O, Lykke Li), music legends that should know better (David Byrne, Tom Waits), and countless other guest



stars, *The Spirit of Apollo* is a lackluster effort destined to soundtrack the trendy commercials of today and overpopulate the used bins of tomorrow. *August Howard*

## THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART

**THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART**

Slumberland/US/CD

Oh, sweet joy! The Pains of Being Pure at Heart—one of several surprise hit makers to round out the incoming class of 2K8 with its *Everything With You 7*—has finally graced us with this prize of a full-length debut and I’m loving every second of it. With their boy/girl bright-eyed vocals and bursts of jangly guitars, “Contender” and “Come Saturday” resuscitate the spirit of late-’80s noisy dream-pop from pre-Creation MBV, Pale Saints, and Chapterhouse. Other songs like “Stay Alive” and “Hey Paul” teem with warm, fuzzy melodies throughout. This album is hopefully just the beginning of many more pop gems to come from this adorable bunch. *Chris Sabbath*

## P.O.S

**NEVER BETTER**

Rhymesayers/US/CD

Minneapolis MC P.O.S (of Doomtree) sincerely gives a damn about the world around him, but thankfully does so without getting preachy. On his third solo shot, *Never Better*, this punk rock-minded rhymist drops down-to-earth joints that were written mainly while he was in a moving car. With this observational approach, P.O.S shares narratives with a purpose (“Been Afraid”) and raps about conquering everyday strife (“Goodbye”). While you can easily get caught up in his reassuring rhymes, his mostly self-produced beats are usually just as strong. Sometimes reflecting a hazy rock influence and other times sticking to minimalist boom-bap, P.O.S has learned to broaden his sound more than ever. *Max Herman*

## PSYCHIC ILLS

**MIRROR EYE**

The Social Registry/US/CD

A slightly less Thirteenth Floor Elevators-go-shoegaze-rock affair than 2006’s *Dins*, *Mirror Eye* sounds as if it’s been marinating for years in an LSD broth. Opener “Mantis” sounds like some epic, early-’70s synth composition, stoically modulating its basic tribal beat, cyclical bassline, warped-bell keyboard motif, and atomized vocals, suggesting what peak-time Hawkwind might sound like if they recorded for Kranky. The rest of the album follows the same hypnotic, stoned tone—the glassy-orbed, languorously seductive “Eyes Closed” is space rock dubbed to infinity. *Mirror Eye* shows the

# WAVVES

*Wavvves*

Fat Possum/US/CD

The idea of doing more with less is usually bullshit, but when it comes to music, the concept has some real merit. Take Wavves (a.k.a. 22-year-old San Diegan Nathan William), who managed to create a blown-out, beach-party noise-pop opus on a four-track in the confines of his bedroom. *Wavvves* is a noisy jumble of distorted surf-pop ditties, grungy guitar workouts, and tripped-out noise experiments. Uniting them all is a persistent haze of distortion—the busted-amp aesthetic is pervasive, to say the least. Fellow SoCal noise-punkers No Age are an obvious comparison, although Wavves is somehow both poppier and weirder, not to mention even more lo-fi. The stomp sunshine of “So Bored” has been lighting up the internet for months, and “No Hope Kids” and “Get In the Sun” are sure to follow suit. *Shawn Reynaldo*

an impression. What’s easy to listen to can be just as easy to forget. *John S.W. MacDonald*

## SUSUMU YOKOTA

**MOTHER**

Lo/UK/CD

Susumu Yokota is no stranger to drastic change—the veteran Japanese ambient artist actually began his career in the early ‘90s as a techno producer. Now, after more than a decade primarily producing instrumental soundscapes, he releases *Mother*, a collaborative and almost entirely vocal album. Enlisting a variety of vocalists (members of U.K. outfit The Chap are the most noteworthy), Yokota has created a pleasant, albeit somewhat bland, album. The music is lovely, full of delicate arrangements and drifting pastoral synths, but the vocals add little to sonic palette; while perhaps this makes the songs more palatable for the “average” listener, it ultimately detracts from the emotional heft of the music itself. *Shawn Reynaldo*

## ZOMBIE NATION

**ZOMBIELICIOUS**

UKW/GER/CD

There’s a good chance that Zombie Nation will never live down the infamous “Kernkraft 400,” which, 10 years after its release, is just as likely to be heard at your local sports arena as it is the club. Nevertheless, albums like *Zombielicious* do help prove that the Munich-based artist is more than a one-hit wonder. This is actually his fourth full-length; and, as expected, it’s loaded with propulsive, synth-driven, post-electroclash dance cuts. While *Zombielicious* doesn’t have any real anthems and definitely runs long, it has a cheeky sense of humor throughout. Plus, songs like “Supercake 53,” “Worth It Pt1,” and “Forza” are bassy slices of filtered electro that will undoubtedly be slurped up by your local blog house DJ. *August Howard*



Check out thousands more reviews at [XLR8R.com/reviews](http://XLR8R.com/reviews), including new albums from Chloe, Dan Deacon, Alela Diane, Erdem, Evli Nine, Glitterbug, Keak Da Sneak and San Quinn, Barbara Morgenstern, Pauline Oliveros, Reeper, Rafael Toral, and more.

## ARTISTS TO WATCH



PHOTO PETER DRESSLE

# JAH DAN BLAKKAMOORE

Brooklyn, NY

Brooklyn may be littered with aspiring reggae and dancehall MCs, but few of them have collaborated with Modeselektor. Originally coming up in the Boot Camp Clique, Jahdan's career took a pretty radical left turn when he collaborated with 77Klash on the Matt Shadetek-produced "Brooklyn Anthem." The viral success of that tune led to further collaboration with Shadetek and his Dutty Artz partner DJ/ Rupture, who decided to tap Jahdan's melodic dancehall croon for their label's first release. The resulting EP, *We Are Raiders*, features grime-influenced production from Shadetek and even a *cumbia* beat courtesy of Chancha Vía Circuito of Buenos Aires' Zizek crew; it will soon be followed by a proper artist album with more all-star production from Maga Bo and Modeselektor, not to mention guest vocals from U.K. grime king Durrty Goodz. When it comes to NYC's burgeoning tropical bass sound, Jahdan is pretty much runnin' tings.

[myspace.com/jahdan1](http://myspace.com/jahdan1)

## BASS GUEST REVIEWS: GEENEUS



PHOTO SHAUN BLOODWORTH

In the lightning-fast world of U.K. urban music, a veteran like Geeneus qualifies as a downright legend. A founding member of the influential Pay As You Go Cartel, Geeneus also heads up underground radio outpost Rinse FM, a station widely recognized for launching the careers of Dizzee Rascal, Wiley, Skream, Kode 9, and just about every other U.K. garage, grime, and dubstep artist of the past decade. More recently, attentions have turned to funky house (often referred to simply as funky), a new sound combining U.K. garage with Latin rhythms and R&B-style vocals. In late 2008, Geeneus dropped *Volumes:One*, which just might be the first funky artist album. That record spawned insta-classics like "Emotions," "Yellowtail," and Geeneus' new remix of Benga & Coki's "Night," so we asked him to go ahead and list a few more must-have funky tunes. *Shawn Reynaldo* [myspace.com/geeneus](http://myspace.com/geeneus)

Guest Reviews: Geeneus

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Teedra Moses  
"Be Your Girl (Perempay N' Dee Soulful remix)"  
White/UK/12  
This is one of my favorites at the moment from Peremps and Dee. It's a nice, soulful track that still manages to smash the dance, with some nice keys and a stiff bassline with an R&B feel to it. I can definitely rely on this one to get the girls moving on the dancefloor.

Souldynamic and DJ Roland Clark  
"Make a Choice (Audiowhores remix)"  
Tempogroove/UK/12  
Sick tune. This one is definitely one of my top 10 of the past month. With stiff drums, some nice percussion, and a salsa feel, this one keeps on building and rolling. I could easily listen to this for 15 minutes. It has a really simple little melody that keeps it moving, and trust me, you can't help but do the funky dance—anyone who doesn't is obviously deaf!

Afefe Iku  
"Mirror Dance (Yoruba Soul mix)"  
Yoruba/UK/12  
This one reminds me of the 8-bar days. I'm actually surprised that I like it at all, as the main attraction is a xylophone and I'm not really in to xylophones. Yet I find myself drawing for this one every single time—it's an instant crowd smasher with its simple-yet-effective rhythm and skippy drums. This track is a definite banger and if you don't believe me, take a trip to Yellow in Brixton and watch the reaction when you fling this one at 'em...POW!

Zinc  
"Pimp My Ride"  
Bingo Beats/UK/12  
God only knows what old Benjamin was on when he made this one. I think he was trying to rebel against the aging process and fight his way back to his youth. With a stupid bassline and fucked-up



L-WIZ  
Stockholm, Sweden

Swedish duo Claes Rosén and Ola Näslund (a.k.a. L-Wiz) has been making dubstep since 2000, but they really started turning heads once Caspa released their "Girlfriend 12" on his Dub Police label in 2006. L-Wiz falls on the mellower end of the genre's spectrum, although they occasionally indulge in what they call "headcrushing satanic basslines." A key name in Sweden's blossoming community, L-Wiz is part of Stockholm's All Out Dubstep crew, and has also released music on Redvolume, the country's first dubstep label.

[myspace.com/lwizdubstep](http://myspace.com/lwizdubstep)



SOLOMUN  
Hamburg, Germany

Bosnian-born DJ/producer Mladen Solomun has actually spent most of his life in Hamburg, Germany, where he has hosted the seminal "DIY" party for more than five years. Solomun began releasing music in 2005, quickly establishing himself as a prime purveyor of soulful tech-house. Many of his releases have come on his own Diynamic label, also home to artists like Stimming and H.O.S.H. His lush compositions can also be found on labels like Four:Twenty, Compost, and Steve Bug's Poker Flat and Dessous imprints.

[myspace.com/solomunakaplay](http://myspace.com/solomunakaplay)



LITTLE BOOTS  
London, U.K.

When Victoria Hesketh (a.k.a. Little Boots) began posting videos of herself performing tossed-off covers on YouTube, she wasn't planning to be tabbed as the future of British pop music. With a loudly professed love for '80s Italo, '90s R&B, and current electro bangers, her electro-pop offerings like "Meddle" and "Stuck on Repeat" (both produced by Hot Chip's Joe Goddard) have invaded indie dancefloors, with help from remixers like Fake Blood, Treasure Fingers, Joker, and Toddla T. Her debut album is expected later this year.

[littlebootsmusic.co.uk](http://littlebootsmusic.co.uk)



DUCHESS SAYS  
Montreal, Canada

Fronted by the keytar-wielding vocalist Annie-Claude Deschênes, the Montreal folks that comprise Duchess Says are a live force who animatedly rip through dance-punk numbers that owe as much to The Slits as they do Don Caballero. Deschênes packs so much punch into her live shows—expect runny mascara, ripped clothing, and much stage-diving—that she even sidelined herself after an on-stage injury, forcing the band to cancel its debut U.S. tour last year. Keep an eye out for the make-up tour in '09.

[duchesssays.com](http://duchesssays.com)

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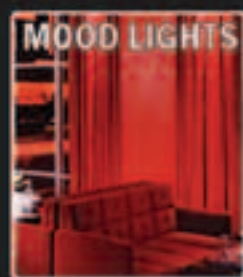
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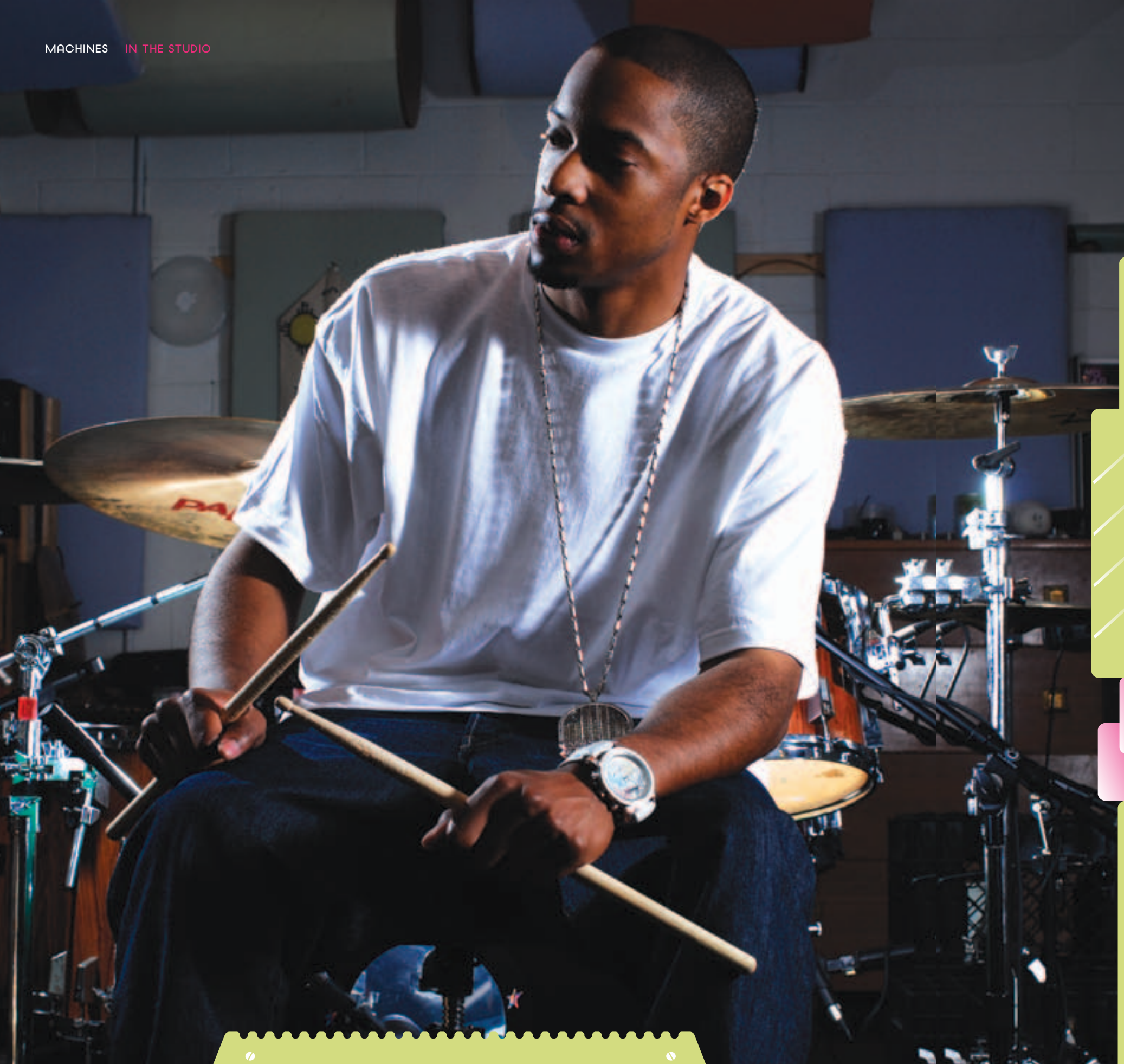


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## IN THE STUDIO: BLACK MILK

THE RAPPER/PRODUCER TALKS KORG SYNTHS AND DETROIT SOUL.

With his breakthrough 2007 sophomore album, *Popular Demand*, rapper/producer Black Milk proudly repped the Detroit hip-hop tradition with his dirty drums and soulful samples. But his latest LP, *Tronic*, sees the man born Curtis Cross looking further into the city's history for inspiration. On *Tronic*, Black Milk utilizes elements of the D's electronic dance movement, adding techno-inspired synth lines and other unexpected instrumentation to his MPC-derived loops. Recorded at his home and at two other studios in the area (Studio One and Disc Studios), *Tronic* was no overnight effort. We talked to the Detroit native about his new approach, new gear, and how this opus was far from a one-man show.

**XLR8R: ON THE COVER OF *POPULAR DEMAND*, YOU'RE CLUTCHING THE MPC, BUT ON *TRONIC*, YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY SYNTHS. WHAT'S THE LITERAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT TRANSITION?**

Black Milk: Yeah, I gotta stop doing album covers [laughs]. I don't know why I keep doing that, but it ended up being like that two times. But yeah, I did use more keyboards this time—you listen to the album and you hear more synth-bass and just keys all throughout. It's not just a straight sample and drums, you know? So it kinda matches the music.

**WHAT KIND OF SYNTHS DID YOU DRAW FROM THE MOST?**

This keyboard called the R2—it's a Korg. I use that a lot. I also used the MicroKorg keyboard a little bit, but it was mostly the R2.

**I NOTICE YOU'VE STILL GOT THAT REAL STUTTER-STEP RHYTHM [ON *TRONIC*], BUT YOU INTRODUCED NEW MELODIES. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT WHOLE PROCESS AND ALSO DRAWING INFLUENCE FROM DIFFERENT DETROIT SOUNDS (LIKE HOUSE MUSIC)?**

The house and the techno, that kinda comes from the D—that electronic sound—so there was a little bit of influence. I knew I had to throw some of those records on and try to find similar sounds to make my own sound. So that was some of the process, and just listening to different types of music from all genres—not just electronic or futuristic, abstract, whatever you wanna call it. It's all styles of music, from funk to soul. That was the process. [I was] trying to create a project where I could show as much versatility as possible without sounding like I'm doing too much.

**HOW MUCH WORK DID YOU ACTUALLY DO AT HOME JUST ON THE MPC? AT WHAT POINT DID YOU ACTUALLY BRING IT TO THE OTHER STUDIOS?**

I'd say every track started at home on the MPC, chopping up the vinyl. And then after that, after I got the main beat and decided if I wanted to use that track for the album or not, that's when I took it to the studio and I finished it up. But every track on there started at the crib.

**AS FAR AS LIVE PLAYERS, WHO IS ON THIS ALBUM?**

A couple cats out the D. There was a lot of musicians that were doing their thing that I ran into. One of the horn players' names is Sam Bobe; he actually played the [trumpet] on "Give the Drummer Sum." And this other guy, John Arnold, he was on guitars. Those are a few guys that I worked with and I brought in a couple trombone players, brought in some key players, [like] Colin Monroe. He produces himself so he produced the track "Without U"; [it's] real synth-heavy but still melodic. Generally I was just trying to get ideas from everyone. I didn't want the album just to be all me trying to create so that's why I brought other ears and other ideas to the table.

**WHEN I SPOKE WITH YOU LAST YEAR, YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO ALSO START PLAYING LIVE STUFF YOURSELF, LIKE DRUMS. HOW HAS THAT BEEN GOING FOR YOU?**

I played keys on the album but I when I get some time I want to actually sit down and learn music theory and really master playing keys. That's one of my next focuses. I can play a little bit but I would never call myself a keyboard player and try to get on stage and actually play with a band. I play a little bit of drums, but I haven't mastered that neither, so the only thing I have mastered is the MPC and the beats. Like I said, I dabble and dabble in other little things, too. But once I get some time, one of my goals is to try to learn a couple instruments and try to incorporate them into my producing process.

*Tronic* is out now on Fat Beats. [myspace.com/blackmk](http://myspace.com/blackmk)

Check out our in-studio interview with Black Milk at [XLR8R.com/125extras](http://XLR8R.com/125extras).



IN BLACK MILK'S STUDIO, MICROKORG AND MPC 5000



FROM LEFT: CHARLIE COOPER AND JOSHUA EUSTIS PHOTO MAUREEN PEABODY AND ROLAN VEGA

## ARTIST TIPS TELEFON TEL AVIV

*Immolate Yourself*, the latest from Chicago's Telefon Tel Aviv, is a notable departure from the band's previous post-rock leanings. Released this past January, just days before bandmember Charlie Cooper's untimely death, the record finds TTA letting go of their trademark wandering guitars and icy programming. Instead, analog synths and tape loops tend to take up much of the space on this nearly danceable, beat-driven debut for BPitch Control. We talked to member Joshua Eustis in early January about some of the record's integral components. *Ken Taylor* [telefontelaviv.com](http://telefontelaviv.com)

### ARP SOLUS SYNTHESIZER

This synth is so underrated, it's a joke. They are getting more expensive now, because people are catching on that it's basically a monophonic Odyssey, or a two-oscillator version. It has a digital ring modulator, which is totally radical for the Dopplereffekt/Elektroids vibe. I use it more for really warbly melodies, like on "You are the Worst Thing in the World." It doesn't stay in tune very well, but it has become a really beautiful part of its character. Just let it warm up for 20 minutes prior to use.

### OBERHEIM XPANDER SYNTHESIZER

This is the six-voice VCO analog synth to end all of them. The voices can operate in stereo as well, which is great. It makes pads more lush than any piece of software has to date. It also makes the most evil 16th-note Giorgio Moroder basslines of death. It is a classic, warm, gigantic, vintage beast. Think *Violator* by Depeche Mode.

### OTARI MX5050BII TAPE RECORDER

This is our two-track, 1/4-inch mixdown deck. Marc Hellner of Pulseprogramming gave it to me on the condition that I would mix his record on it. This thing changed the entire way that we work, and gave us a real physical way to get into sound manipulation in a very old-fashioned, almost classical way. Aside from the fact that we mixed our record down to tape for the master, we'd make tape loops of drums and run them against themselves, slightly slower or faster, and make this kind of Steve Reich phasing thing happen, as on "Your Every Idol," for instance. It's not delay making the drums flam and freak out—it's two tape loops, one slightly faster than the other.

### ROLAND JUPITER 6 SYNTHESIZER

I drove out to Bumfuck, Missouri and picked this up off some crazy monster-truck-type guy. I almost electrocuted myself when I reached back to unplug it. The guy had some crazy rigged-up wires attached to it for the power cable. Although it almost feels like a toy to program, it's really very versatile. You can make amazing string patches, like the one on "Your Mouth" or the bass patch on "Immolate Yourself." You can also make amazing rave patches and massive Hoover bass sounds.

### ARP OMNI II SYNTHESIZER

We always dreamed of having an Arp string synth. We loved the string sounds on the old soul records, usually made on an Arp Solina—really fake and phase-y sounding. A bunch of bands like Tangerine Dream and Duran Duran used this guy. We used it throughout the record but it really stands out on "You are the Worst Thing in the World." This thing has no MIDI programming capability and the keyboard plays like it's made out of wood.

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## DIGIDESIGN PRO TOOLS 8 DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION

Several years ago, after Ableton Live proudly added support for MIDI sequencing, a friend of mine joked that it was like advertising for the "New and Improved Car-Now With Wheels." Of course that was a dorky analogy, but it seems appropriate to drudge it up given the sort-of-radical improvements of Digidesign's Pro Tools 8. No joke—MIDI sequencing really is a highly touted new feature, as is a revamped interface, rudimentary scoring, Ableton-style pitch-shifting, and plug-ins that do things like mimic analog drum machines and fuzz boxes.

Traditionally used as a recording tool and/or whipping boy for the failure of GnR's *Chinese Democracy*, Pro Tools now attempts to break into Logic's and Ableton's music-creation market. It certainly isn't a bad idea, but the "industry standard" has some catching up to do. For starters, the MIDI sequencing is a far leap away from Logic's streamlined workflow, as is the ease of pitch-shifting, borrowed from Live. However, packaged tools—especially the AIR series, with its Vacuum Tube Synth and

Lo-Fi (a bit-decimator)—are noticeable improvements over many of the bundled plug-ins from the competition. The new drum machine, Boom, also does the unthinkable by including 808- and 909-sounding kits as presets, along with a cute 16-step sequencing interface that works like an easier version of Reason's Redrum module.

It's still unlikely that any of Pro Tools' new improvements will be enough to sway Logic and Ableton die-hards, but that might be beside the point. Pro Tools is the standard DAW found in most recording studios, so it's not necessarily a bad thing to know how to use it. And for those that would rather crank out a quick rhythm track than spend a weekend with Max/MSP, Pro Tools has made substantial strides towards being one of the easiest to grasp options out there.

Brandon Ivers

digidesign.com; MSRP \$299.95

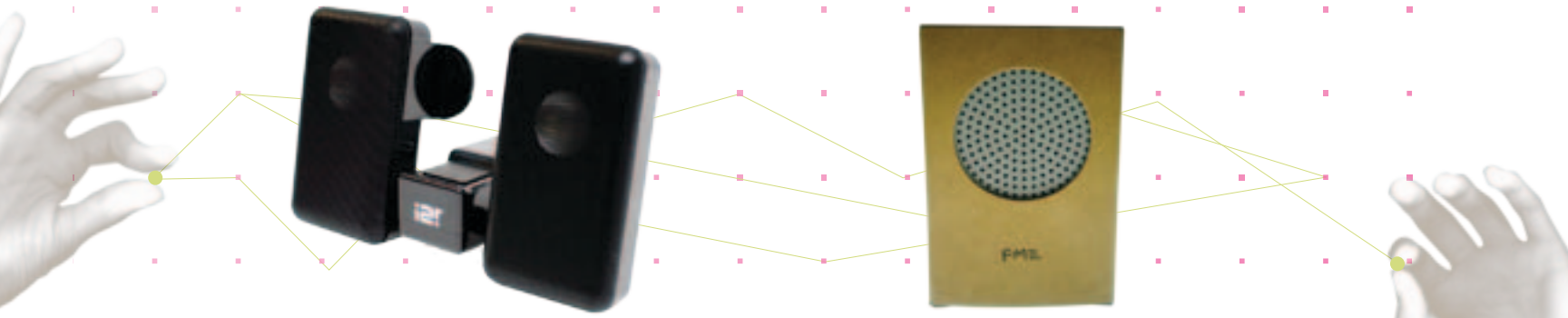


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### i2i FOLDING PORTABLE SPEAKERS

Yes, the future is here—I can hear it loud and clear on the back of the bus. That's where teenagers have their Lil' Wayne listening parties with their friends' badly distorting cellphone speakers. For the sake of better audio quality and actually being able to make out the beats, I'd love to outfit them with i2i Foldable Portable Speakers, which deliver surprisingly loud, clear sound powered by just four AAA batteries. The speakers fold out like a *Star Wars* X-Wing fighter and cradle any type of MP3 player, from Touch to Nano to Zune. The unit's bass response is feeble but that's offset by the pristine mid-/high output. All the better for blasting "A Milli" on the evening commute. Comes with carrying pouch, batteries, and converter plug. *Tomas Palermo*

i2igear.com; MSRP: \$39.95

### FM3'S BUDDHA MACHINE II TONE GENERATOR

Four years ago, Beijing-based ambient duo FM3 released the first Buddha Machine, a deceptively simple, pocket-sized music box that played loops of soft, haunting electronic drones and string strums through its tiny speaker. The sequel is more of an instrument than a mere music player, as users can now alter its sound by raising or lowering its pitch. Two or more Machines at once can create either a pleasant mix or a clatter to wake the dead. Most of the new sound loops (nine of them) are a pleasure to manipulate, whether they're wildly vibrating strings or eerie drones that faintly arise, vanish, and then reemerge. This critic's favorite uses: tucking the Machine underneath a bed during naps, and startling house cats. *Cameron Macdonald*

fm3buddhamachine.com; MSRP: \$23

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## VIDEOGAMES SEEING RED

*MadWorld* finally brings a gory edge to the cuddly Wii.

The Wii has certainly left its cuddly white mark on the videogame industry by outselling both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 by a healthy margin, making the two more powerful systems look anemic in comparison.

Despite its astronomical sales, the Wii is known more for its waggly controls and its droves of mom-friendly shovelware than it is for an abundance of stylish or mature-themed titles. The Wii could simply not be viewed as the machine for the hardcore. Until now...

Mixing the dystopian über-violence-cum-entertainment vibe of the "running man" with a graphic-novel-in-motion aesthetic (where the only color you'll see is that of the gallons of crimson spilled by the game's many eviscerations), Sega's *MadWorld* gives the Wii its most visually aggressive, hard-edged title to date.

Taking on the role of Jack, a brutish mechanic with a chainsaw arm, you compete in twisted game show called *Death Watch*, run by a group of terrorists known as The Organizers who have taken over your fair city. Getting rid of the many enemies chasing you down in a variety of ways is the name of the game here—from ripping them in twain and hurling them into walls of spikes to straight-up decapitation to smacking them into a giant dartboard with a baseball bat. This ultra-violence in turn entertains the onlookers, who are betting on your success. The more you please the bloodthirsty viewers, the more options open up to you.

"There are no games like it on the Wii right now," says Executive Producer Atsushi Inaba of developer PlatinumGames, "so we thought it would be exciting to make it for the Wii for that very reason. We think we

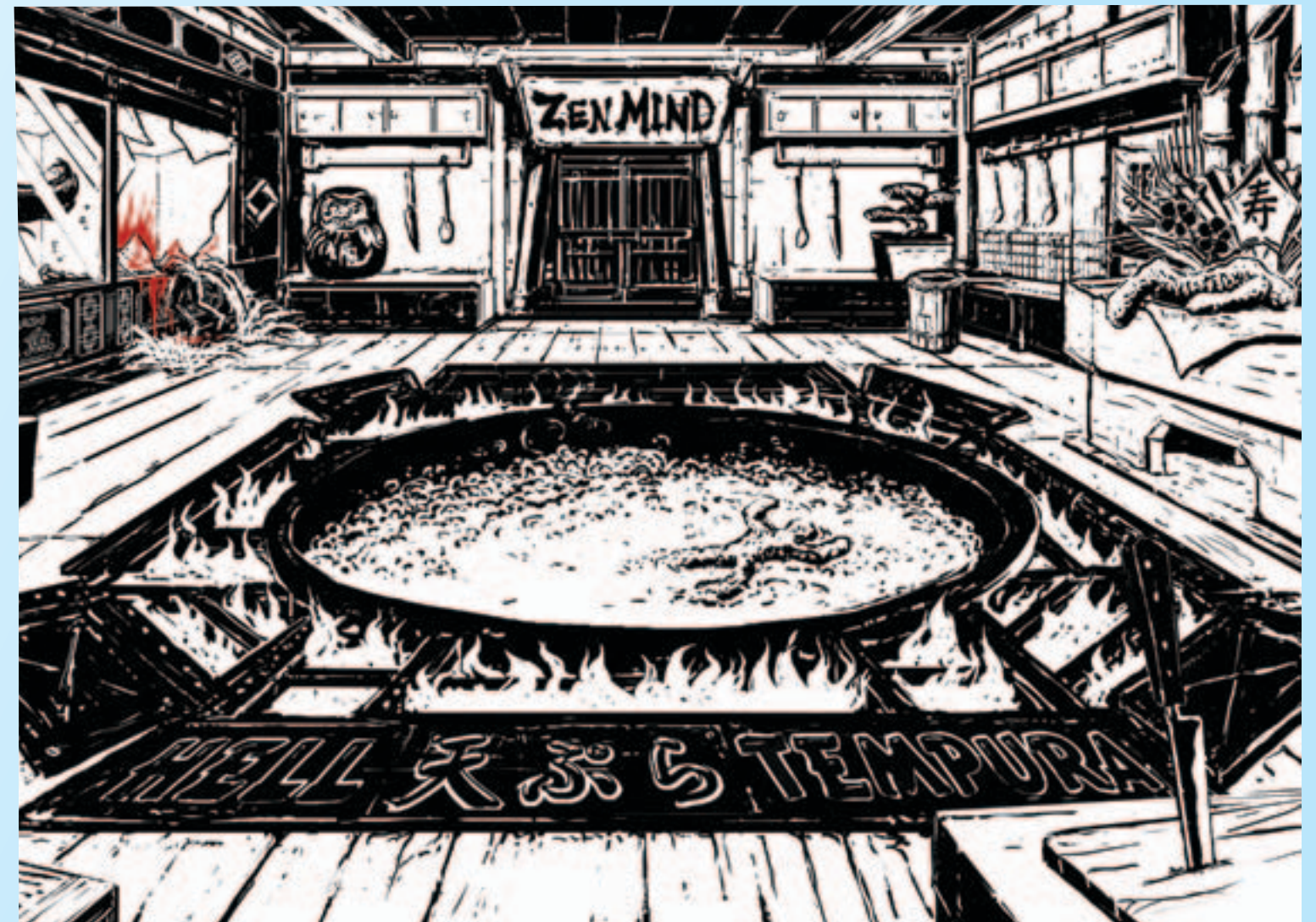
were able to make a game that stands out on any platform but the fact that it's a Wii game makes it that much more surprising."

While the violence is over-the-top and satisfyingly visceral, it's *MadWorld's* art style that really sets the game apart. Looking like an interactive version of Frank Miller's *Sin City* (or even the video for KMFDM's industrial dance classic "A Drug Against War"), *MadWorld* really sets the paradox bar high for both minimalist color palette and outright visual mayhem.

"We had no intention of going with a realistic art style," says Inaba. "That wasn't the kind of game we wanted to make. In order to portray violence that was too over-the-top to be real, we went with a Western comic-book motif. In addition, we included the black-and-white element that's not seen in games."

While it may seem that a purely black-and-white game would lack depth and be difficult to play, Inaba explains why PlatinumGames went this route: "Visual impact is the main reason. Fun gameplay alone isn't enough to draw people in—the art style is important, too. Initially, our thought was that it might make the game a little more difficult to play... but as we worked on the game, we took steps to make sure the game was still easy to play, such as adjusting the way we show the backgrounds."

With balls-to-the-wall gameplay, a unique aesthetic, and a hip-hop soundtrack to boot, *MadWorld* is sure to burn a brand on the brains of Wii owners thirsty for something meatier than carnival games or yoga in 2009. *Ryan Rayhill*



## A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

While there may be a dearth of original "hardcore" titles for the Wii, Nintendo is no stranger to stylish violence on their systems. Here we take a look at some past releases aimed at quenching Nintendophiles' more base urges.



**Mortal Kombat (Midway, 1993)**

When the first *Mortal Kombat* appeared on the Super Nintendo, the company decided that the blood and fatalities would be too much for their fans and had it removed. They were sadly mistaken—the uncensored Sega Genesis version was widely considered superior when both were released in 1993. Nintendo wouldn't make the same mistake twice; they allowed *Mortal Kombat II's* digitized gore to go untouched a year later.



**No More Heroes (Ubisoft, 2008)**

Cel-shaded graphics, an outlandish story, and plenty of ass-kicking via lazer swords and wrestling moves makes *No More Heroes* one of the more unique titles the Wii has to offer.



**Conker's Bad Fur Day (Rareware, 2001)**

Inspired by *South Park's* potty-mouthed tykes, *Conker* took the average cutesy squirrel and basically turned him into Andrew Dice Clay for the Nintendo 64 audience. He drinks beer, swears, pisses on things, chases tail, and fights a living mound of shit. Yet despite all the toilet humor, *Conker* was actually one of the best N64 games ever made. Go figure.



**Manhunt 2 (Rockstar, 2007)**

Undoubtedly the most controversial game to ever grace/shame the Wii, *Manhunt 2* has you ruthlessly murder your would-be captors in a variety of gruesome ways, setting the bar pretty high for what is tolerable on Nintendo's latest system. Unfortunately, it wasn't that great a game.



**Killer 7 (Capcom, 2005)**

As if taking on the role of a crippled, schizophrenic assassin were not wild enough, this Gamecube cult fave has your multiple personalities, including a Mexican wrestler or British albino, take on a group of mutant terrorists only to discover that you yourself are a god. WTF?



**Resident Evil 4 (Capcom, 2005)**

A risky departure from what came before it, *Resident Evil 4* proved to be the most impressive Gamecube title ever in both style and substance. You battle crazed Europeans infected with some gross virus that makes heads explode. Get vaccinated before traveling overseas, kids.

Words Ryan Rayhill



# loading...

XLR8R picks the hottest videogames and gear of the month.



You may not think it to look upon his well-shorn dome, but Vin Diesel is one of the biggest game geeks of all time! Not only is he an avid *Dungeons & Dragons* enthusiast (yes, really) but he also owns his own videogame studio (Tigon) and emphatically stars in everything they make! Which makes his lead role in the new *Wheelman* (Midway; Xbox 360, PS3) actioner a no-brainer. (Like many of his films! Snap!) But on the real, *Wheelman* sees Diesel as an out-of-retirement driver-for-hire, mixing high-speed car chases through the streets of Barcelona with explosive *GTA*-meets-*Gears of War* run-and-gun action. Playing as a prequel to the upcoming film of the same name, *Wheelman* should not be missed by fans of driving fast and blowing shit up.

Continuing on the movie-game tip, this month also brings us *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* (Universal; Xbox 360, PS3), based on last summer's Angelina Jolie assassin epic. *WoF* picks up where the film left off—as rookie killer Wesley Gibson, you're up against a clandestine cabal of murderers known as The Fraternity; you must curve bullets, slow time, and dive for cover in the City of Love as you search out your birthright as the king of assassins.

Perhaps the most anticipated title of the month comes to us as a rotting, stinking corpse... of awesome! *Resident Evil 5*

(Capcom; Xbox 360, PS3) finally arrives and steps up the action, the story, and the gore of the legendary series' previous entries like never before, with co-op gameplay and plenty of sun-soaked African environments... and hundreds of murderous locals infected with zombie-like bloodlust! *RE5* has quite a pedigree to un-live up to, but with its compelling story, kick-ass gameplay, and visuals surpassing anything we've seen on consoles to date, it looks like this is one zombie epic that will never die.

Now we take you from grizzly gallons of blood-soaked zombie guts to bouncing blobs made of pure adorable. *Loco Roco 2* (Sony; PSP) doesn't so much put you in control of said goo balls as it does their environment, which you must manipulate to ensure that gravity carries your lil' Loco Rocos to their final destination. The Rocos—who can split apart into smaller pieces to fit into tight spots—are attempting to reclaim their pastel-soaked planet from an invading group of nasties that wish to defile it. Looking a bit like Colorforms come to life, with whimsical tunes sung in a made-up language, *Loco Roco 2* is an addictive little piece of art.

If blobs ain't your bag then perhaps we could interest you in a little alien invasion? So little it's portable, even! *Resistance: Retribution* (Sony; PSP) brings the epic firefights of its PS3

brethren to Sony's portable machine as you play a British Royal Marine with a personal vendetta against the alien Chimera hordes who forced you to rub out your own brother! Ice cold! With eight-man multiplayer mode (including a mode that finds you infected with an alien virus) and PS3 connectivity, *Retribution* should fill any alien slayer with headshot-induced glee.

Whilst we are on the portable tip, you would be remiss not to check out the latest entry into everyone's favorite crime-time caper series, *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars* (Rockstar; DS). Marking the series' first Nintendo-licensed outing in several years, *Chinatown Wars* returns to its top-down roots but adds cel-shaded animation to the mix for a more cartoony appearance. Don't let the visuals fool you—this is as hardcore a DS title as you will ever see. *Chinatown Wars* not only incorporates all the usual degenerate activities but all new ones, some involving the DS touchscreen, including tattooing your gang recruits and dealing illicit narcotics! Taking place in the same universe as *GTA IV*, *Chinatown Wars* is certain to thrill an all-new crop of would-be criminals.

- 1. *RESIDENT EVIL 5*
- 2. *WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE*
- 3. *WHEELMAN*
- 4. *GTA: CHINATOWN WARS*



## HARLEM SHAKES Technicolor Health

"...these New York kids craft a sweet cacophony..." - Spin

"...From Big Stary western, through a touch of swing, across rockabilly into R&B and storming out in rock mode, as ethereal harmonies sing out above." - All Music Guide

3.24.09

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I wanted to put the sun in here so that when you turned to this page it would shine in your eyes and blind you. I wanted it to be unexpected, and to be a surprise. But it is not that I wanted to blind you. I just wanted to distract you from what you may be occupied with right now, so that for a brief moment your attention would be transfixed by the light. I wanted to disrupt and intervene in the activity of your attention. It is not that I wanted to give you something else to focus on or think about. I wanted to give you nothing to focus on, and to make sure that this nothing imposes itself in a way that you cannot ignore. Like light unexpectedly shining into your eyes creating a temporary paralysis. But what I have given you here is not this. If it tries to be, it is inadequate. It is only a description of what I wanted. Maybe if you tore this page out and put a match to it, in that brief moment it takes to burn away it can be like the sun.



VIS-ED

# David Horvitz

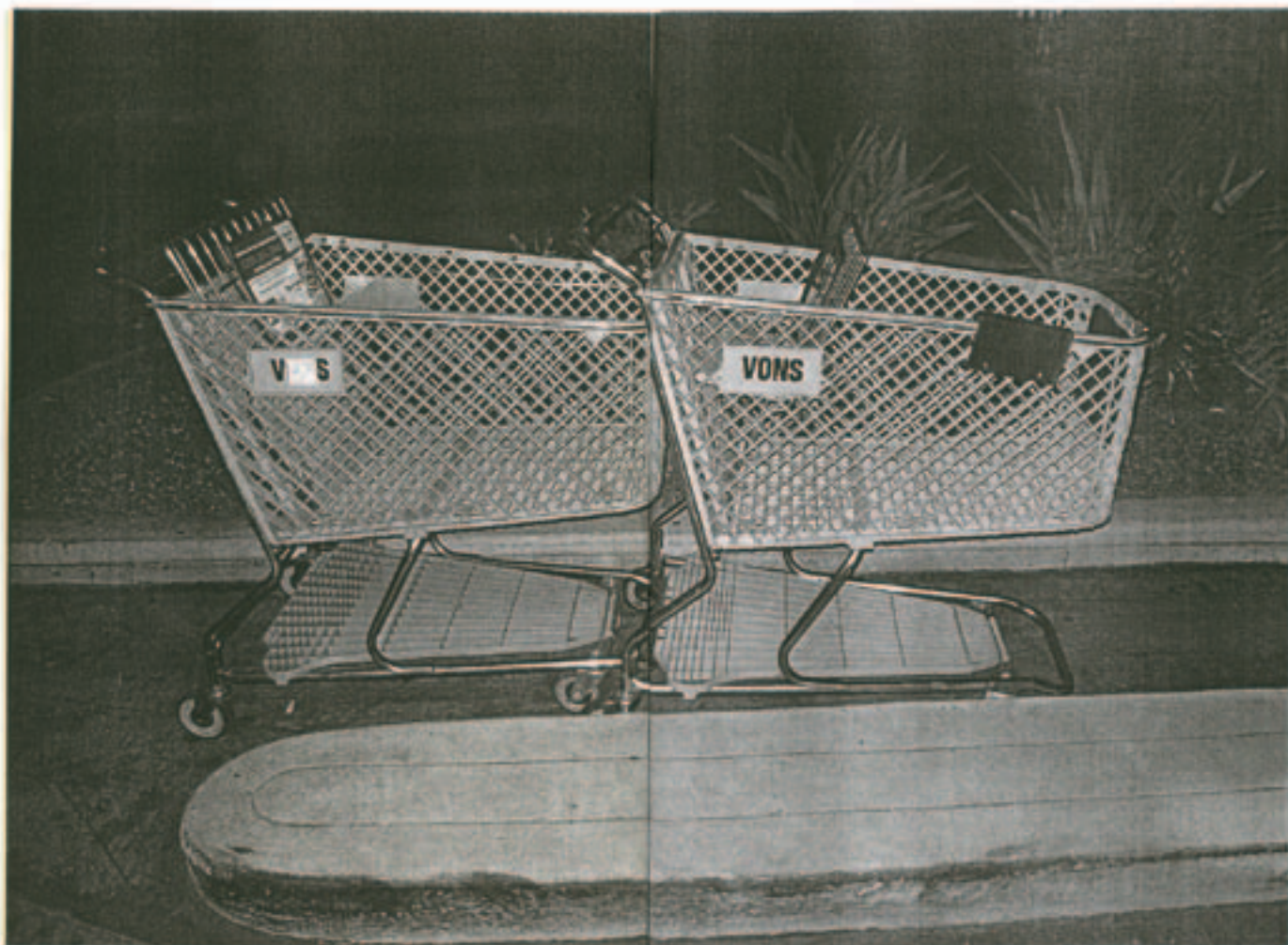
A renaissance man talks book "borrowing," capturing lost moments, and giving it all away.

**Left:**  
David Horvitz,  
"Untitled," exclusive  
for *XLR8R*, 2009

From endless photography projects to social experiments, detailed zines to mail-order mischief, New York-based photographer and conceptual artist David Horvitz is a poster-boy for DIY prolificacy. "When I finished college, I got a job at a one-hour photo store in Hermosa Beach," he recalls. "When the manager wasn't in I would make my own prints, and then give them away for free at The Smell or other shows in L.A."

Horvitz is deeply involved with the indie rock community, directing music videos for High Places and B.A.R.R., and curating and photographing a picture-disc series for Aagoo Records that includes contributions from No Age, Casiotone For the Painfully Alone, Sunset Rubdown, and others. He's joined Oakland noise-pop weirdos Xiu Xiu on tour numerous times, and published a photo book and DVD about the band as well as conducting an experimental Polaroid project with their fans.

Still, Horvitz's most fascinating work is his least conventional. He has spent much of 2008 photographing the sky every day and forwarding the shots to an online mailing list, stamping every dollar bill that crosses his path with the phrase "A small distraction interrupting you from your everyday routine," and collaborating on bizarre projects like *The Wikipedia Reader*, a print edition of the ever-changing online encyclopedia. We caught up with Horvitz to understand his methods and learned a bit about Okinawan music and astral projection along the way.



Above:  
Image from the book  
*Public Sex Acts*,  
2008

***XLR8R*: Is there a central theme surrounding all of your projects?**

David Horvitz: That anything is possible anywhere at anytime. And to give everything away for free.

**Who do you consider your inspirations?**

Rabble-rousers, mischief-makers, saboteurs, subversives, insurgents, tricksters, magicians, drifters, wanderers, the bored, the restless, the playful, the hopeful, the lost...

**Do you take time to reflect on a project once it's complete, or do you generally move on to the next thing right away?**

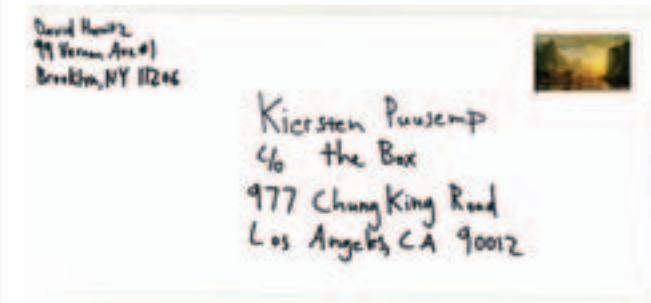
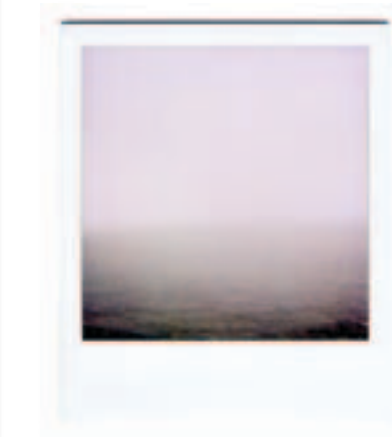
I usually put a lot of thought and energy

into projects before I start them, and while I am in the process. So, by the time they are complete, they are complete because I have fully articulated them, and everything I am doing and wanted to do has worked itself out. I will reflect upon my practice as a whole, and try to figure out what it is I am doing, and why. But for single projects, their process and completion is a process of thought and reflection.

**Where do you stand in the debate of digital versus analog photography?**

I think a lot of the argument is based around taste—preferring one over the other— which makes it a pointless argument because taste

is so arbitrary and subjective. I think to resist digital is an act of Ludditism. Both are their own things, and have their own qualities and potentials. One thing I think is lost in the shift into digital is the role of waiting to see what is on the roll of film while the film develops and the prints are made. Waiting in the dark room as the print slowly appears onto the paper in the tray of developer. Waiting for the Polaroid to develop, for the photo-booth picture to drop out. These vacuous moments, these really beautiful moments—they are lost.



Above:  
Mail art letter and  
Polaroid to Kiersten  
Puusemp, 2008.

**What kind of equipment do you use?**

I use whatever I have. It doesn't really matter. I feel I can make do with anything: a Polaroid camera, a small point-and-shoot digital camera, a throwaway camera. I don't have a 35mm anymore because I was at the end of the Coney Island Pier at dawn one morning and the wind blew over my tripod and the camera smashed into the pier. For printing, I use my home consumer printers, or sometimes just take it to drugstores. I just did a project where I made an exhibition available at drugstores. I'd upload the files from my computer to a Rite Aid or CVS or Walgreens near whoever wants to see it; then they would walk in to their local store

and buy it. I actually just saw the William Eggleston show at the Whitney, and some of his drugstore prints were there. I've also been doing newsprint the last few years. These are great because so many are printed, and then I can just give them away for free or sell them for really cheap. I feel that the quality of the material should have no say in the weight of the work. Something can be so light, yet seem so heavy.

**Are you able to make a living from your art?**

I don't have a day job, so I am somehow able to live without working all the time. I get some money from advances, lectures, sales, and random small jobs... I personally don't

want what I do to have anything to do with the corporate world. However, I think you can be smart about it. For example, what if you did design work that had hidden subversive potential? I don't mean corporatizing revolutionary politics or creating a "radical" aesthetic, but to actually infiltrate society with ideas of resistance and play via the corporate field. Or, what if some company gave you thousands of dollars to design their campaign, and you directly funneled every cent of it to someone or some organization that could actually use the money in a positive manner? I don't think that would be selling out. That'd almost be like a form of volunteering.



Above:  
Untitled Polaroids



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<p>The distance between the both of us Price: ONE POSTAGE STAMP</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>You will receive a document stating the distance (in miles) between the both of us.</p>	<p>If you mail me a disposable camera and a self-addressed stamped envelope with enough postage to mail it back, I will take all the photographs and mail the camera back to you.</p> <p>I will not develop the film. I will never see the photographs, only you will.</p>



Cut out and send to: David Horvitz, 99 Vernon Avenue #1 Brooklyn, NY 11206 USA

Right:  
"How to Exit  
a Photograph,"  
2008



Above:  
"Cut Here,"  
exclusive for XLR8R,  
2009

**If you had unlimited resources, what would you do?**

I had this idea a few years back to take a skywriting jet and write "I'M BORED" across a clear blue sky in Los Angeles on a Sunday afternoon in the summer. I thought it'd be funny if all the people leisurely laying in the sand looked up and saw it. It'd be a total waste, and pointless, but a little humorous.

**What music do you like to listen to?**

When I work I listen to music to create a headspace to think. Brian Eno, William Basinski, Javanese gamelan, songs on repeat, Genevieve Castree, this great live recording of Nels Cline, Thurston Moore, and Zeena

Parkins that I've had for years... I love Okinawan music. Right now I am listening to this amazing track by Infinite Body, which is going to go on one of my free downloadable collaborative projects with Mylinh Nguyen [*Songs for the Arctic Ocean*]. But to be honest, I find myself listening to sad, depressing music most of the time.

**What is the most valuable lesson you've learned as an artist?**

This isn't a lesson I've learned from being an artist, it's just a lesson I've learned in life in general, and can be applied to anything, especially to artists: Nothing is going to happen unless you make it happen.

**What do you hope to accomplish in the future?**

I want to learn how to astral project. This is going to take a lot of practice and patience, but I think I can do it. I got a book I found in a collective library at a DIY punk house in Santa Barbara that I have been "borrowing" for a few years now.

Download and print "How to Exit a Photograph" at davidhorvitz.com

See more of David Horvitz's artwork at vis-ed.net/davidhorvitz.

TBC

# Lost in Translation

Somalian rapper **K'naan** talks about learning more than just English from Eric B. & Rakim.

Words **Eric K. Arnold**



Like his good friend Emmanuel Jal, Somalia-born rapper/poet K'naan was exposed to civil war in his native land before coming to the West as a refugee and becoming an internationally respected artist. An emissary of lyrical consciousness who combines rap, poetry, reggae, and world music influences, he's compiled an impressive resume: He's chastised the UN for its lackluster relief efforts in Africa, won Juno and BBC Awards for his 2005 debut, *The Dusty Foot Philosopher*, and collaborated with Chubb Rock, Damian Marley, Kirk Hammett, and Adam Levine on his new album, *Troubadour*. Though he downplays notions of an "African scene" taking over pop culture, K'naan represents a movement in and of himself, having performed everywhere from Humboldt, CA to Djibouti while eschewing commercial-rap clichés.

**XLR8R:** Your aunt was a singer and your grandfather a poet, and your name means "traveler" in Somali. Traveling seems to be in your soul, and music and poetry in your DNA. K'naan: It really is. I think the naming process is pretty real.

Your new album is called *Troubadour*, which means 'traveling musician.' How have your travels influenced the music you make? It's given me a unique perspective and therefore I think that the music I create is something that's often hard to classify as any genre, ya know? I think that's a result of restlessness and development as a human being.

After fleeing Mogadishu, you came to New York in 1991, a time when hip-hop culture was at its peak. Is that where you got exposed to rap music? That's kinda where I got exposed to the bulk of it. I got exposed to one album when

I was still in Somalia during the war, Eric B & Rakim's *Paid in Full*. But I began to hear more music in the early '90s. *Hard to Earn*, that album by Gang Starr, Nas had *Illmatic*, *Ready to Die* by Biggie Smalls. That new culture-painting MC sort of defined how we are supposed to see their experiences in the world that we live in. That was kind of the most influential aspect of hip-hop to me. 'Cause [now] I had a place of my own that I sat musically.

Did studying rap help you to learn English? Yeah. It helped me learn not just English as far as words, but also culture—this new culture that I was kind of a part of as a black person coming out of Africa. You know, there was a way that the world saw these artists and the communities that they come from. Coming to North America and being a visible person of color already, [it was like] I belong in that group. So it helped me that way.

When people talk about "the black experience," they usually refer to the African American experience. How does the African immigrant experience in the West fit into that? It has elements of it that are pretty much the same but it has elements which are different. With the African immigrant experience, we're just trying to get through the daily things like language, know what I mean? Not even having language on our side, not even having properly gone through the channels of education, the opportunities are different for us. The stresses and the pressures [are different for] African immigrants: We have to take menial jobs just to support people back home. The weight I feel is sometimes even greater in a way because we're starting at the bottom.

*K'naan's Troubadour is out now on A&M/Octone. [myspace.com/knaanmusic](http://myspace.com/knaanmusic)*

XLR8R (ISSN 1526-7246) is published monthly with bimonthly issues in January/February and July/August for \$20 a year by Amalgam Media, Inc., 3180 18th St. #303, San Francisco, CA 94110. Periodicals Postage Paid at San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to XLR8R, 3180 18th St. #303, San Francisco, CA 94110.

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